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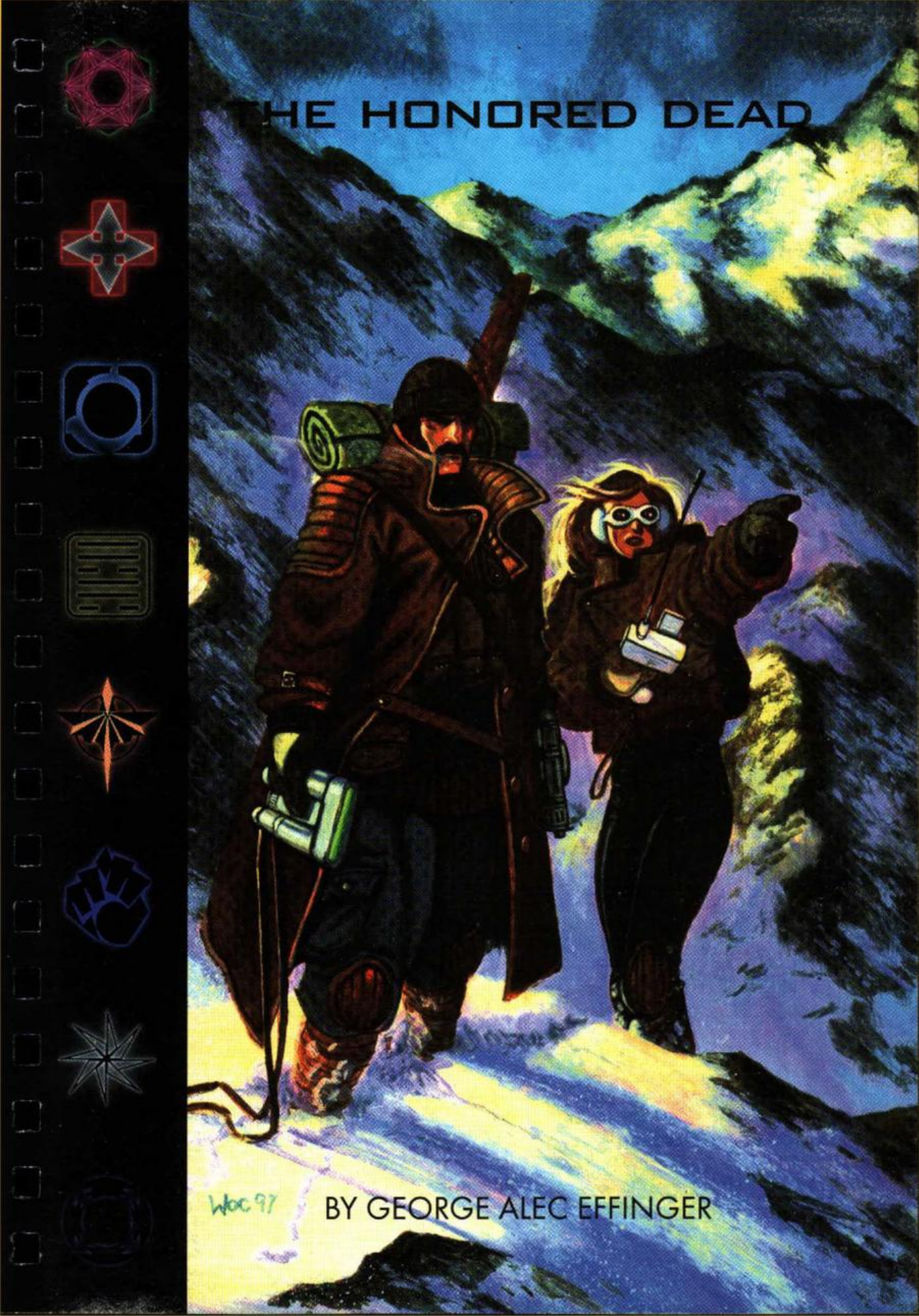
THE HONORED DEAD
BY GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER

John Zsolt leaned against a chest-high cairn and tried to catch his breath. The air was so cold that it burned in his lungs. When he exhaled, moisture caught in his mustache and froze solid in a few seconds. He could see snow still unmelted on the mountain peaks surrounding him. The narrow pass was silent, but the blood hammering in his ears made Zsolt think of late-season avalanches, of lonely travelers swept down to their deaths by tons of falling snow and ice. He'd be no good to anyone then, he thought. There was no point in coming this far just to throw it all away with a single misplaced step. He leaned down with his hands on his knees.

"This is Switzerland now," Varya called. She was in a better mood than he was. She also didn't seem to be having any trouble breathing.

Zsolt looked up. "That mean anything special?" he asked.

She shrugged, and her blonde hair swung a little. "It's not Italy, so *that's* something. And nobody's caught you yet. That's even better. We're getting closer to Basel with every kilometer. I don't think there'll be any more long detours."

"Terrific," Zsolt said. He was still having trouble getting a good, deep breath. "How far now?"

"Want to see on the map?"

He raised one hand and waved it sideways a little. He was too worn out to say no.

She gave him one of her beautiful, brief smiles, the kind that had no friendliness in it at all. "Think of Switzerland lying on its side just over Italy, okay? We're down in the lower left-hand corner. Basel's about as far away as it can possibly be and still be in Switzerland, all the way on the northern border with France — what's *left* of France."

Zsolt wasn't going to let her goad him. "Stop trying to cheer me up," he said.

She laughed. Like her smile, it was empty. Her blue eyes got rounder. "Hey," she said with false innocence, "it's 2120, people don't hike anymore. This wasn't *my* idea. I wanted to fly or at least rent a skimmer. *You're* the one who thought somebody was trying to stop you. *You're* the one who wanted to hug the dirt all the way to Switzerland."

"That's not the way I remember it," Zsolt said. There was a long, low rumbling as tons of snow and rock fell from one of the glaciers into a crevasse. Zsolt had stopped paying attention to those sounds.

"All right with me." Varya shrugged and turned away. "Remember it however you want. What's your plan to get to Basel?"

Zsolt crossed the frozen ground between them. "I don't know," he said. "What's your 'invisible psionic guidebook' say?"

She turned to him again with another of her smiles. Zsolt shivered. "There's an old inn up ahead maybe half a kilometer. Been there for centuries. It's the place where St. Bernard dogs got their name."

Zsolt stared out over the pass, where the land fell away toward a river valley. "I'm trying to save somebody's life," he said. "I don't care about history."

"That's the Combe des Morts down there," she said, walking again, leading the way. "The Valley of the Dead Guys. So come on if you're coming." She didn't look back over her shoulder; she knew he'd follow.

In a moment, Zsolt saw that she was right — she was usually right. Two venerable stone buildings sagged in the saddle of the pass, looking unchanged since the monastery was founded twelve centuries before. Not even tire tracks or uplink dishes marred the timeworn stillness.

One building was evidently a church and the other must've been the inn Varya had known about. It was bigger than he'd imagined, with enough rooms for a couple of hundred travelers. Zsolt wondered about that. Who came through this way? Roman legions, maybe, shuffling past on the road to conquer some other province. Or Napoleon with his army. Nobody ever showed up here just to be *here*; if they stopped at all, it was only because it was the route to somewhere else and night was coming on — as night was falling now.

If Zsolt and Varya didn't stop and call it a day, they might get lost in the tangled, frozen mountain gorges. Then the monks would turn loose their well-trained St. Bernards, but if Zsolt wasn't found in time—

"Dreaming already, John?" Varya said with a mocking edge in her voice.

He shook his head to clear it, settled his pack more comfortably and walked briskly by her on the track. Sometimes he didn't like the tone she got, and sometimes he just wanted to finish what had to be done — without discussion. Going down into the valley was for tomorrow; not being captured was for tomorrow; finding his way to Basel was for tomorrow. What happened *after* he got to Basel, well, he'd think about that tomorrow, too. Right now, all he wanted was to meet a kind, hospitable innkeeper who spoke some language that Zsolt or Varya understood.

The older of the two buildings, the church, had a porch with a handbell. Zsolt glanced around, but no one was in sight. He climbed to the porch, hesitated, then raised the bell and rang it. Its clanging and echoing shattered the Swiss stillness until Zsolt was sorry he'd ever touched the thing.

The raucous noise produced a man from within. He was short, heavy and red-faced, and dressed in black clerical robes. He smiled at Zsolt and Varya. "*Grüetzi*," he said, welcoming them in Schwyzerdütsch, the Swiss-German dialect. He also greeted them in French and German.

"Ready for this guy?" Zsolt murmured.

"He'd be dead before he could touch you," she said.

"Try to be quicker. Some of those psyqs don't *need* to touch me."

"I'll just get rooms for us, all right? *And* I'll take care of the rest."

The friar beckoned to them, and they went with him into the ancient stone church. They followed a vaulted, dusty corridor around the inner sanctuary to a covered passageway. Zsolt could see that it led across the yard to the second building, the inn where the monks sheltered weary travelers.

As they walked along the cloister, the friar chattered in French, but slipped frequently into Schwyzerdütsch. Although Zsolt spoke French, the monk's dialect was difficult to understand. Zsolt heard the word *vendredi* and caught something about a *jour maigre*. "Why's Friday special?" he whispered. "What's he mean by *jour maigre*? If it's something that'll attract a crowd, we need to get out of here."

"Don't jump, magyar," Varya said. "He's just saying he's sorry, but Fridays are lean around here. No meat."

"Oh, okay. I got my own anyway."

Varya frowned at him. "Leave it in the pack, John. Respect the place."

"What difference is it to you what I eat?" Zsolt asked. "I didn't think churches were such a big deal to you."

Varya shook her head. "Churches aren't. Beliefs are. Maybe when you're my age you'll see the difference."

Zsolt estimated she was seven, maybe eight years older than he — enough to make her an authority whenever it served her purposes, but still young enough to make Zsolt do all the hard work. It wasn't only that Varya was somewhere between handsome and beautiful, and that she was as smart as any three random strangers combined; she was also simply better at manipulating people than Zsolt was. She was a great teacher, too, and he was taking careful notes.

The friar showed them to cold, quiet rooms on the second floor of the larger building. He'd come for them again in time for vespers, and there'd be a communal supper after prayers. Varya translated for Zsolt. The black-robed man turned away, and Varya went into her quarters, shutting the heavy oak door.

John Zsolt sat in his clean, somber cell and stared out of the iron-barred window toward the mountains to the north. The River Rhône was still invisible beyond them. Zsolt was glad to be alone, glad to have time to think over his plan.

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Brother Luce hung up green tags for Rooms 115 and 117. "They could be any two people in love wandering through the Alps in June," he said. "I suppose they're not Swiss or German, although I could be wrong about the woman. Her dialect is very good; you hardly notice an accent. He didn't say very much, but he looks like he

doesn't need to. You can see she's got the mind for both of them. She's one of the Gifted; I'd bet tonight's pie on it."

Brother Enric was rinsing off vegetables brought up from Bourg-St.-Pierre. "Gifted," he said with a short, bitter laugh. "I *hate* that word. They invented it themselves, you know, so they wouldn't sound too special. My mama used to say, 'You'll see, dear, they're not really better than everybody else, they're just Gifted.' In school, the goddamn Gifted kids *always* thought they were better —every time."

"You'd rather I called them 'psions'?"

Brother Enric hmmphed. "At least 'psion' doesn't make you feel like they're reminding you how inferior you are. That's probably why they use it, so we don't pay attention to what they're up to all the time."

"You're suspicious of everybody."

The cook shrugged. "I didn't like it on-stage. That's what I called it out there: *on-stage*. That's why I'm in here."

"I'm here to serve God," Brother Luce said simply.

"Sure you are," said Brother Enric. "I'll bet they're not in love."

"What? Who?"

"Your travelers." Brother Enric brought a heavy cleaver down on a handful of leeks. "I'll bet they're not in love."

"They probably haven't even noticed the climb."

"They've noticed, all right. You've watched too many vids. That's your problem. Old romantic vids. Those two visitors may be crazy in love, my friend, but their *knees* aren't. It's the knees that tell you you're walking up a mountain."

Brother Luce didn't say anything for a moment. He just looked up at the ceiling where he supposed God would be listening. The two monks had had this conversation before, and if God hadn't grown bored of it, Brother Luce surely had. "How many is that for tonight?" he asked at last.

"Twenty-two," said Brother Enric. "You're forgetting the four Chinese guests not sleeping at the hospice."

"Right. Twenty-two." Brother Luce turned over four more green tags in case the rest of the kitchen and housekeeping staff needed reminding. Then he piled all of Brother Enric's scraps on a tray to take to the compost pile. As he left the kitchen, he thought, "Why *couldn't* they be in love?" But he didn't say it aloud.

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The setting sun had vanished behind the peaks. The villages of the deep valleys were already sunken in twilight. For a few minutes longer, though, a radiance slanted down from the west, and the Alpine glow lingered in John Zsolt's chamber. The instant he became aware of it, it slipped away. He sat alone in the darkened room and watched as the stars trembled into the sky.

His mouth formed the words "Zsolt...Káposzta Kid...read." The minicomp on his belt projected a holographic index in the emptiness of the air. Zsolt glanced at it briefly. He still did not speak, only shaping the words "mail" with his lips, then "Pat." He chose the most recent entry.

His friend's image was there in the cheerless, cold room. "John!" Pat said with a grin. "How you doing? Thought I'd thank you for the games and the books. I'm not even sure you'll see this before you go. Maybe you already left for—"

"Pause," Zsolt murmured. He stood and went to the tall, narrow window. The church and the road back to the Italian frontier were behind him, on the other side of the inn. There was nothing to see now, just the dark mountaintops against the black sky and the brilliant stars.

Zsolt turned again and looked. In the middle of the room, Pat was caught in mid-gesture, in perfect humor and perfect health. Both were illusions. Zsolt had read this letter dozens of times, at least once each day since it arrived. Pat had waited to send it until after Zsolt went away to Europe.

It wasn't an accurate image of Pat. It was an avatar, a carefully designed reproduction from a time before Pat was stricken with D. It didn't look like Pat now and it didn't sound

like Pat now. Even the gestures were edited in from old files. It had been months since John Zsolt had seen his friend's face light up with joy that way. Months since Pat was strong enough to go hiking, one of his favorite pastimes. Now, Zsolt knew, Pat's face was taut with strain, and he did little but pick restlessly at the raveled seams of his blankets.

"Play." Zsolt watched the system-animated avatar — Pat seemed active, eager, thriving — but Zsolt clearly remembered the last times they'd been together. Pat had already begun to deteriorate, and since then he'd have gotten worse, not better. In the letter, Pat avoided the subject of his illness, unable to tell even his most loyal and devoted friend how wretched he'd begun to feel. Zsolt turned away again from the false form and voice; he couldn't bear to watch anymore.

He listened to Pat's vacant chatter, but stared out of the cell's dreary rough-hewn window. He could make out familiar constellations: Orion and Taurus, each attended by more faint stars than Zsolt ever imagined in the skyroom of his home arcology. Pat's voice filled the stone chamber, grateful that Zsolt had stayed his friend even after Pat got sick, and how rare that was, and how lucky Pat felt — "really, magyar, I feel blessed *despite* coming down with D."

Zsolt wondered what Varya was doing in the room next door. Was she performing some secret psyq ritual, maybe "attuning herself to the subquantum resonances" to help them slip safely into Basel? The clears had more double-talk explanations than the pyramid-and-crystals crowd. But hell, he thought, whatever worked.

She'd revealed almost immediately that she was a clairsentient. He said that no one really used that word. Where Zsolt came from, young clairsentients wanted people to call them "Ductrans," from a Latin word meaning "to lead." Nobody called them "Ductrans," either. In everyday speech, the Æsculapian Order — the healers — were called "docs," and the clairsentients had become "clears." Clairsentients, especially Varya, loathed that slang, but they couldn't do anything about it because they were the Good Guys. Or so they said....

"Two last things." Pat's strong baritone voice broke into Zsolt's thoughts. "One big thing and a small one. The small thing first: Since you've been away, Dunyha's adopted me. I don't mind your cat curling up on my feet. She's kind of cute, really. I don't mind her settling down on my chest while I'm reading, either, except she's not a kitten anymore and she weighs a lot more than she thinks. She grooms my beard with her raspy little tongue. I *do* mind that she's been sleeping on my pillow — right on my hair. Last night she startled me awake, coughing up a furball on my forehead."

Pat was pretending to take the disease in stride, trying to be brave, but that was enough of an effort without unprovoked cat attacks. Zsolt smiled.

"The last thing." Zsolt always quit the letter at this uncommon, grim change in Pat's tone. But high in a mountain pass hidden in the Swiss Alps, at the hospice of Great St. Bernard, Zsolt listened to his friend's voice. Maybe the peaceful setting granted Zsolt the strength, but he turned to watch as Pat's idealized avatar spoke its last words.

"Don't forget me, John. All those years, all the ways life pulled us apart, we could always count on each other. Yes, I'm afraid of D, but I'm *more* afraid of being forgotten after I'm gone.

"John, you're sure you can find a miracle for me in Switzerland. Well, good, I'm glad it gives you something to work toward, something to focus your mind on. My own feeling is you won't find any help there. I'll stay home and hold out while D takes over my body. I may give in before you get back again, but that's not such a terrible tragedy. We knew it could happen anytime, John.

"I dreamed once that when I was born, God gave me a second calendar page — for the *last* day of my life. I've spent years trying to forget that image. You will have a last day too, John. If you're lucky, you'll have a friend as good as the one I have in you. Please let me ask this one last time: *Remember me, John.*"

The strong young avatar aimed Pat's trademark smile into Zsolt's eyes. The image flickered and went dark. The sunset had long since faded from the rocky slopes; there was no moon, and John Zsolt's small room now held nothing but deep and dismal shadows.

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Delemont's desktop was broad and empty, made of some sturdy material that mimicked white oak. Months ago, he'd cleared it of every bit of visible system hard-

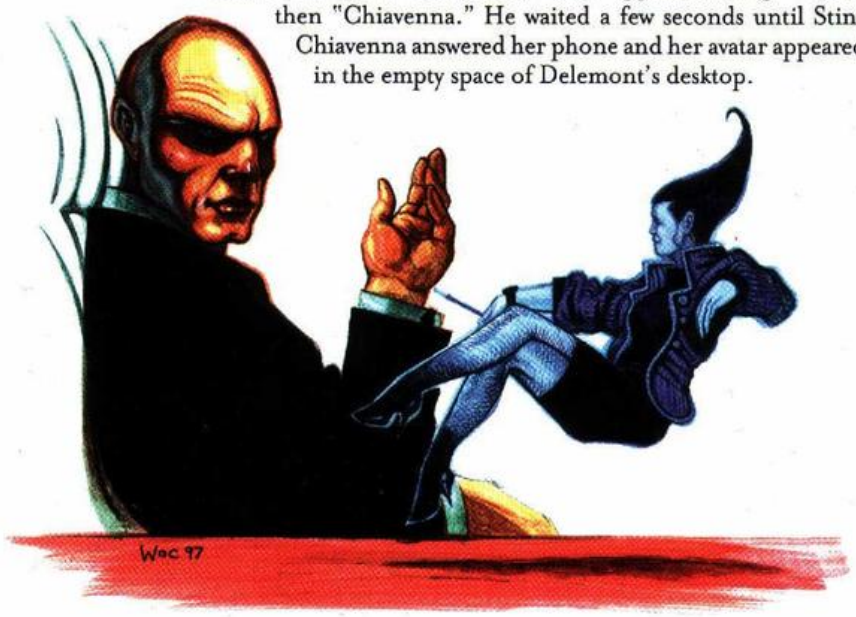
ware, which was now stripped down to its smallest components and hidden within the desktop itself. He'd packed a cardboard carton with his clock, lamp and hardcopy machine — all in matching white alabaster — a silver and blue souvenir mug from São Paolo, and even his family holos. He labeled the box "D Necro Sections" and tucked it high out of reach on a shelf in his office's walk-in closet.

The desk's frame was made of the same simulated oak. Delemont had designed it without slots or trays for pens, paperclips or other small office supplies. There were neither drawers nor compartments for notepads or hanging file-folders. There wasn't the smallest space to hide even the most miniature electronic audio or video recorder. As a desk, it was virtually useless. As an introduction to Delemont, the man, it was all you needed to know.

On the bare, flat desktop, in the far upper-right corner, two polished shafts of petrified wood rose up like weathered desert spires. Conspicuous on the uncluttered surface, the two shafts of stone confined between them three narrow books. Delemont had written two of the volumes, and a former colleague had written the third. That last book had been dedicated to Delemont out of professional regard, but the inscription page was as far as he'd ever read.

At the base of the taller column was a tiny sliver of rock, a chip that Delemont had noticed every hour of every day. Whenever Delemont felt any sort of dissatisfaction, he looked at the small bit of stone and knew there was some Asian philosophy in it. He didn't know what, specifically — he didn't *need* to know what. If anyone had asked him, Delemont would've replied serenely, "What does a waterfall *mean*?" Delemont was able to appear serene, and he was able to sound serene, but Delemont would never again know true serenity of mind. He'd chosen between the tranquillity he'd yearned for and an opportunity to wield vast power. As yet, he had no cause to regret his decision.

Delemont leaned forward and his white leather swivel-chair creaked. His lips formed the words "Delemont," then "33...Rütli...13," "call," then "Chiavenna." He waited a few seconds until Stina Chiavenna answered her phone and her avatar appeared in the empty space of Delemont's desktop.



"I found them for you," said the Italian woman's avatar, chosen to look brisk and businesslike, smartly dressed in a steel-blue suit, her long black hair brushed smoothly back, with just a few stray strands to one side. The avatar, about ten inches high on Delemont's desk, looked comfortable in a chrome-steel recliner padded with black leather.

"We found them ourselves an hour before you did," said Delemont. He didn't bother to use an avatar. Chiavenna saw him just as he was: powerful, angry, and able to cause the woman a lot of trouble if Delemont didn't get a satisfactory explanation.

Chiavenna's avatar pursed her lips, a tiny signal of annoyance. "You're paying us—"

"Yes, Stina," said Delemont, "we're paying you, but we're not completely relying on you. We're following our own leads in case you don't deliver. And so far, you haven't delivered." Almost without realizing that he did it, Delemont reached out and moved the chunks of petrified wood to either side of the avatar. Chiavenna couldn't see them, of course, but her image now seemed trapped between the heavy rocks.

"Well, Mr. Delemont," Chiavenna said, "last night when you commissioned us, it was already pretty late. Of course, we put our best available team on it, but as of an hour ago—"

"At 7:15 this morning," Delemont said in his coldest voice, "John Zsolt made a quick stop in the church at Great St. Bernard, went to the first pillar on the left, and dropped a thick roll of Italian new euros in the poorbox. He and the woman caught a ride in a small truck down into Martigny. From there, they could've followed the Rhône east, but I'm guessing they're smarter than that. They wouldn't trap themselves on a boat, and they must know we're watching the airports, magtrain stations and bus terminals. They'll continue cross-country, on foot or hitching rides on small roads, and try to shake us in Montreux, Lausanne or Bern."

Chiavenna's avatar didn't say anything for a moment. "There's no proof they even know we're following them."

Delemont made an impatient sound. "You believe what you want," he said. "However, if you don't have results for me in twenty-four hours — and I mean the cryal — we won't be offering your outfit any further assignments."

Chiavenna cleared her voice. "I want to be sure about one thing: You don't care what happens to Zsolt or the woman?"

"I hear the...enthusiasm in your voice," said Delemont, "and frankly, it's offensive. The Æsculapian Order would rather save lives than waste them. Now and then, our goals result in misfortune for some people. We know it's unavoidable, but we still regret it. So to keep the bad luck to a minimum, there will be no more mistakes from now on. Zsolt's cryal could lead to a general panic. If that happens, we want to be in a position to manage it. That means we need more time to get ready."

"This cryal, whatever it contains," Chiavenna said in a faltering voice, "should I warn my agents?"

"Signorina Chiavenna, if you don't get the cryal from Zsolt, one of those regrettable misfortunes that I so deplore will find you within minutes. You won't have to worry about anything else."

Delemont broke the connection and cleared away the woman's avatar with a curt wave of his hand. He took a moment to position the two towers of petrified wood more precisely in the upper-right corner of his desktop. Then he sat back in his white leather chair and began some slow, relaxing breathing exercises.

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John Zsolt was in a warm room with the feel of summer afternoon lingering in the corners. He recognized it as the modular apartment of his friends Kaylee Sat-Chok and Tavo Brnek. That told Zsolt he was half a world away from the Valais region of Switzerland, as Kaylee and Tavo's place was slotted into one of the remaining Zaozhuang arcologies south of Beijing. It didn't occur to Zsolt to wonder how he came to be there.

From behind and above came the voices of Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, watered silk and gravel, singing "Moonlight in Vermont." Zsolt noticed a strong, sweet fragrance of flowers — three perfect white gardenias floating in a silver bowl of water, resting on a white concert piano. Shafts of lowering sunbeams through narrow louvers painted the piano with tawny tiger stripes.

Zsolt turned toward a dark doorway and stopped. He wasn't walking through the modapt, but drifting through it as he might float in a dream or holosim. The room didn't seem quite real despite the specific sensory evidence: the muted jazz, the strong perfume of the gardenias, the blazing mist of dust motes in the sunlight. Zsolt felt relaxed and detached; not only was it a dream, it was *someone else's* dream. Zsolt was a silent witness, watching but not touching, not *able* to touch. It was a peculiar experience, but not alarming.

He moved along the corridor again, toward the dark room. A woman's urgent whisper from the sunlit room overtook him: "I can't get him to eat, not even to try a swallow." It must've been Kaylee Sat-Chok. Zsolt remembered the uproar when she'd finally been released, and then she'd joined Tavo in Zaozhuang. They'd thrown a big party that lasted three days, and friends came from all over the world and the orbital and lunar cities. Zsolt had been at the party with a woman he'd known at the time. Janica? Belita? He couldn't even recall their faces.

Pat had been at the party, too, with one of his crazy money-making schemes, this one to develop a better OpNet frag-mapper. Pat was sure it would mean a fortune for them all. There hadn't been much time to talk at the party — all Pat was interested in was his wild new idea, and Zsolt was trying to keep track of Janica or whoever she was. He and Pat could talk another time, any other time — they'd been the best of friends since childhood and there were *always* parties....

Of course, at Kaylee and Tavo's celebration in China, no one — especially not Zsolt or Pat — had even heard of D. It would be at least another year before Pat noticed the first minor symptoms.

"Don't force him if he doesn't want it." Now it was Tavo's voice pulling Zsolt out of his memories. "You don't want to make him choke. He's so weak."

Zsolt knew that Tavo and Kaylee were really there, but evidently they couldn't see or hear him. That didn't particularly bother Zsolt, either. Tavo came up the hallway, and they passed through each other without sensation.

Zsolt entered the dimly lit room. On the northern and western walls were large, dark screens. They weren't windows, of course; not even Sat-Chok and Brnek's combined wealth could afford a modapt in the arcology's exterior wall, one with a view outside. These were projection panels that now showed a midnight scene, a synchronized sea scrolling up a clean, endless beach beneath program-perfect stars in the fairest of all night skies. If Pat had been able to lift his head from the pillows, he could've found the Pleides or followed the curve of Ursa Major around to the bright splinter of Arcturus.

Pat seemed too weak to fight his withered body free of the clean cotton sheets. Lately he'd been unable to manage his own cleanliness and grooming, and Kaylee had shaved Pat's head, which was now covered with scars and mottled bruises. To Zsolt, he looked like a silhouette in the dusky light, like a motionless feature of the landscape — not at all like the friend whom he challenged to hovercycle races and with whom he watched holos not so long ago. Pat's impossibly long, tapered fingers dangled loose, stirring slowly like the tendrils of a beautiful but blind sea creature. He lay open-mouthed, his breathing shallow and wheezing, the smooth and unlined face of his youth betrayed by gauntness, by sunken darkness where there shouldn't have been shadows at all.

"Maybe someday," Varya said, "with all my insights, I'll figure out how you can stand to eat cold leftover *gulyás* for breakfast." Her disapproval implied an intimacy that — had Zsolt been listening — he would've found ominous. She held a battered pie tin toward him, and a hunk of brown bread.

Zsolt's eyes widened. "What *was* that?" he said, gasping. "A hallucination?" His breath puffed away like the gray rainclouds that swirled low over the Swiss countryside.

"Here, take it. I'm not your serving-girl and I'm not going to stand around all day holding it, either. I hired you to get me safely to Basel, but I'm beginning to think I made a mistake. Hell, eat it if you want it. Otherwise, I'll leave it here for the next poor starving schlub of a traveler."

"I *mean* it," he said in an urgent voice, "what *was* it?" Zsolt stood against a damp, gritty rockfall, not far from the flat, stony spot where he'd slept. He'd already rolled and packed his sleeping bag, and he'd broken more wood for the breakfast fire. His jacket was cold and muddy, and his tough petrocotton jeans were damp.

Varya didn't turn around. She was kneeling by the campfire. "What was it like?"

"I was *right there* in the room with him, at Sat-Chok and Brnek's in China. I didn't even know he'd gone to stay with them. He looked barely alive, a hell of a lot worse than when I saw him last."

"They're searching for the cryal, John — the Æsculapians."

He turned and spat into a trickling brook that was so lovely, so Swiss, so picturesque that it absolutely *needed* something spat into it. "Yeh? Then you were right about what the docs said in that first clinic we went to. For all their talk about helping people, how much do they actually do?"

Varya stood and put a hand on his shoulder. "In that place in China just now, you could move through the rooms, right? But it was like no one could see you or hear you."

Zsolt stared. "It wasn't a dream — I've been awake for hours. And the *details* I noticed...."

"My first time, I was only seven or eight years old. It had something to do with my little sister's birthday. I saw her come into the dining room with this big old chocolate cake, and she caught her foot in a fold of the rug and fell on her face. She got chocolate cake all over her pretty birthday dress and on her face and in her hair. Then she started crying. So four months later, it's her actual birthday, okay? And in she comes with the chocolate cake, and I said something about her taking a dive into it and she dropped it again and fell. My mother figured it was my fault somehow because I knew it was going to happen, and I tripped her or something. She wailed on my ass for half an hour." Varya looked off into the distance, smiling. "I wish we had a better 'orientation program' and 'free introductory gifts,' but all I can say is welcome to the world of clairsentience, magyar."

Zsolt's jaws tensed. "*Couldn't* be," he said.

Varya was amused by his sheer revulsion. "I knew you were a latent from the first time we met. I agreed to some of your stranger decisions on this trip, just to make sure you didn't do something even more foolish. Like join one of the other orders, I mean. We need you, John."

Zsolt wasn't happy about any of this. "I'm *not* a psyq, okay?" he said furiously. "I had some kind of weird daydream, that's all. It doesn't prove I'm one of you."

"One of *us*." She squatted down, filled the coffeepot with clean water, and jammed it into a corner of the campfire.

"We'll see." Zsolt took the pie tin from her and looked into it. There was a thin reddish stew in it. "Varya," he said, "trust me. In one area, you're as empty as I am. This may be decent spaghetti sauce, but it's awful *gulyás*."

Varya shot him a venomous glance. "I got some nearly boiled potatoes here, pal. Tell me you're sorry —*fast* — and maybe I'll let you have one. That's the best deal you're going to get this morning."

Zsolt stopped listening to her. He played the vision in his mind again, and the strangeness of it made him shiver. He did remember a couple of things, though: Only days ago, when he'd last been in that room in China, the piano had been black, not white, and Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald had been singing "They Can't Take That Away From Me."

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When Crystina Chiavenna was fourteen, she spent two of the worst months of her life staying at her father's summer house on the Dalmatian coast. The major reason was simple enough: Her father's villa was only halfway up the hillside. She could act cold and dismissive toward the young men and women who resided below her, but all of the really interesting people lived farther up the dusty, rutted road near the ruined town of Karloska, and they passed their disdain from the hilltop all the way down to the stony plain, scorning Stina Chiavenna and anyone else who didn't count.

Yet, since most of them were there for the summer only, they all had to pretend to be friends or else be bored to death in exile. They held parties and arranged outings and practiced their social skills and torments, just as they'd learned them from their elders. One sultry day in August, after swimming nude in the magnificent marble pool at the Villa Suska, their hostess, Marveille de Vos, had the staff serve a special round of drinks.

Marveille took a fluted glass of champagne and raised it. "This is for you, Stina, since you're going back to Rome tomorrow, lucky you. In the last few weeks, you've complimented me on my sapphire engagement ring thirteen times—"

"Fourteen," one of the young men corrected.

Marveille turned and gave him a quick, warm smile. "Stina, I just wanted to wish you all the luck in the world in dealing with the envy and covetousness that must be eating you up inside. Come on, sweetie, drink up! It's just a joke!"

Crystina Chiavenna's expression froze in place for a second, and then she laughed. She'd noticed that while everyone else's champagne was the normal color, hers was a pale sapphire blue. She lifted the flute, saluted Marveille de Vos, and gulped the sparkling wine. It was, of course, excellent. Then she laughed again and flung her glass to the ground, where it shattered and tinkled. There was just another bit of silence, and then all of the others drank their champagne, laughed, and broke their glasses on the marble flagstones, too.

One of the young men — not one of the *very* popular young men — came up to Stina. "I don't know many people who would've handled that with such good grace," he said. "You showed a lot of refinement."

Stina looked up at him and smiled. "Yes," she said. "Now, let's get back in the game." And she dived into the churning water of the ancient pool.

An hour or so later, when she decided it was a good time to leave, Stina said goodbye to everyone and gave Marveille de Vos a kiss on the cheek and thanked her for a lovely afternoon. Then she went into the bathhouse, collected her clothes, and used the toilet. When she stood up, she saw that whatever had been in the champagne had turned her urine a bright blue. She caught herself just as she uttered a quick exasperated sound. She took a couple of deep breaths and calmed down — after all, by dinner time tomorrow, she'd be in her own house in Rome, with her own friends and her own servants, and with decent luck, Marveille would get unexpectedly dead or pregnant before next summer.

That last idea was a happy thought as she dressed. She was just imagining the de Vos bitch at eight months as Stina came out of the bathhouse. There, in rows as if arranged for a holo snap, was Marveille and all of the others. Stina stopped short and gasped.

"The color does suit you, sweetie," said Marveille cheerfully. "Don't worry, it'll go away in a few days. I thought you could freeze some and have sapphire crystals bigger than I'll *ever* get!" And they all laughed.

Stina just stared, surprised to feel almost nothing. In fact, she didn't think her face was flushing at all. She looked at them for another heartbeat or two and then joined their amusement. "I really do have to run," she said. "I've got a ton of packing to do yet. *Ciao*!"

"Next summer, Stina!" someone called after her. She was already heading toward the main house, and didn't turn or say another word. She looked straight ahead until she got back to her own villa.

There is a proverb: Never stir the wrath of a patient man. More than a dozen years later, it was probable that Marveille de Vos had forgotten Stina Chiavenna entirely, but Chiavenna remembered *her*. Chiavenna knew where her old antagonist lived, how many marriages, divorces and children she'd had, what her income was and what she was addicted to.

If she hadn't taken her revenge yet, it wasn't because she'd forgiven Marveille de Vos. It was because it hadn't yet seemed like the perfect moment.

Chiavenna shook her head, focusing her concentration. Her two thugs had stopped their Concurso hauler crosswise, blocking the narrow road almost immediately after it turned sharply to the right. They waited in the rocks on either side, and were well-armed. Chiavenna sat in the black leather driver's seat of her hand-crafted Solano, parked on the road's shoulder twenty meters past the truck. She watched the red seconds tick away on the console. Zsolt and his bitch were on a Shendai hovercycle that they'd stolen, registration number W3371, racing toward her at 180 kilometers per hour, slower if Zsolt hadn't handled a bike before. While she waited, Chiavenna idly wondered just how protected Delemont, her client, actually was.

She heard a low, throaty growl behind her, like a giant mountain cat. A hovercycle engine, she thought. Just as she flicked her eyes to the rear-view mirror, she saw a single brilliant headlight blaze around the shoulder of rock, then tip or slide away abruptly, out of sight. Not even a high-performance hovercycle would have enough vertical lift to

clear the Concurso. Zsolt would have to lay the cheap Shendai down — his only chance of preventing disaster. Then Chiavenna heard the coarse bark of an autorifle and saw the glimmering reflection of laser fire in the car's rear-view as her men fired dozens of rounds from their weapons. The noise and light show was just for effect, and to keep Zsolt flat on the dirt. While her men were still shooting, Chiavenna slipped on her dark glasses, glanced at her reflection in the mirror, and got out of the car.

It was a pleasant night, with the promise of warmer weather on the smoke-scented breeze. Chiavenna heard her men barking orders — in German, she supposed — and checked her flechette pistol as she came around the Concurso. She saw Zsolt and the woman for the first time. They were both doing a very good job of being motionless. Dressed in durable petrocotton jeans and jackets, neither looked badly hurt, although the woman's right sleeve was ripped and there was blood. They were lucky Zsolt hadn't spilled their brains all over the Swiss countryside when he laid down the cycle. "Bones broken?" Chiavenna asked.

Nobody answered. One of the guys kicked Zsolt's shoulder.

"I don't fuckin' know yet," Zsolt said.

"Get up," Chiavenna said. "I just want the cryal."

"I don't—"

Chiavenna snapped off a shot that chipped the pavement beside his hand. "I'll save us all a little time here. I want the cryal. Don't play dumb. You don't get a chance to make deals. If you don't give it to me *now, goddamn it,* I'm going to kill her." She paused to let all of the emotion bleed from her voice. "You *know* I'll kill her. Get up."

Chiavenna watched Zsolt stand up slowly. He was good-looking enough, dark and with a mustache, although he was a little shorter than she expected. She watched as his large, intelligent, Hungarian eyes flicked down at the other woman, who met his gaze and smiled slightly. He looked back at Chiavenna, started to reach into his jacket and then stopped, raising his eyebrows. Chiavenna laughed out loud; it was the most amusing part of the day so far. Such an ancient vid moment — Chiavenna holding the flechette pistol on him, he asking with his expression for permission. She almost prayed that he did have a weapon in there, but she knew that wasn't where he'd carry it. "Give it to me," she said.

Zsolt's hand went into his jacket's inside pocket, and he brought out a cryonic vial of brushed metal, about the size of a walnut. He held it out on his palm. "I have a friend," he said. His voice was steady; there was no pleading in it, and Chiavenna was interested to hear what she thought was a touch of a threat. "He's dying. Getting this cryal to Basel is the only hope he has."

Chiavenna held her pistol on him and gestured for the tall thug — she'd never bothered learning their names — to take the cryal. "As far as I'm concerned, it's just money," she said in her flat voice.

Zsolt hesitated, glanced again at Chiavenna's weapon, then handed over the cryal. She took it from the tall guy, backed up a couple of steps, then turned and went to her car. As she murmured it into gear, she looked into the mirror again. The hired muscle could take their payment now: whatever the two on the hovercycle had been carrying in cash, plus the bike itself, as well as whatever Zsolt and the woman's bodies were worth in the nearest town with a chop shop.

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After Chiavenna's black Solano roared away, the night settled into the sounds of cricket-chirping along the road to Basel. The darker, heavier thug pointed his weapon at Zsolt and Varya and demanded something in a gruff, Baltic language that meant nothing to Zsolt. The tall guy translated: "He wants you to grasp your wrists behind your heads. He saw it in an American holovid somewhere."

Zsolt glanced down at Varya as he complied, but she seemed dazed and didn't respond. Then, for no reason that Zsolt could figure, the dark guy in the Nippon Ham Fighters cap yelled something at his colleague and sliced the tall one into two or three equally dead portions. Startled, Zsolt dropped his hands, waiting to see what would happen next. The dark guy picked up his former partner's gun and gestured with it,

indicating that he wanted Zsolt to back off. That presented no problem to Zsolt; he would've walked clear to Cape Horn for a guy aiming a Voss laser carbine and a Banji autorifle at him.

Zsolt was ignored as the dark-haired goon walked slowly and somewhat stiffly across the few meters toward Varya. Each pebble he crunched, each piece of glass that snapped sounded like gunfire in the still Swiss night. "Fine," thought Zsolt, "what's happening here? Rape the good-looking woman before killing us and driving off with the admittedly piss-poor loot?" Zsolt remembered from his years fallen on hard times that Number One in the Street-Smarts Handbook cautioned: If you're interested in one of two hostages, kill the other goddamn motherfucker before anything else.

So the Nippon fan had his eyes on Varya. He carried both weapons sloppily, pointed down, as if he'd completely forgotten Zsolt's existence — a possibility, since Zsolt didn't know what kind of unbalanced nuts that strange woman had hired. For all Zsolt new, these guys were a couple of extreme sociopaths. He didn't wait to find out. He made a flying tackle behind the guy's knees, dropping them both to the dirt and rubble.

The thug shook his head and spat a foreign phrase as Zsolt went for the weapons. Zsolt had just slapped a hand on the Banji carbine and rolled over to take aim when 90 kilos of Baltic thug slammed down on him. The guy shouted an endless stream of abuse, matched by a look of combined anger and fear. Zsolt didn't have time to bother with why the guy was freaking out this way, nor did he particularly care.

A heavy fist crashed into Zsolt's jaw, but did little more than piss him off even more. He pointed the autorifle at the hired hood. "Get off and hug the ground if you want to live," Zsolt said.

Terror came to the fore as the strongarm's eyes seemed to clear, then rage returned. "*Nyet!*" he cried, fumbling back for the Voss laser.

Zsolt let off a few rounds into the guy's chest, tumbling him back onto the road. "Too bad he couldn't follow directions."

"John," said Varya, "among the topics we'll no doubt talk about from here on in, please remind me that I don't want to know a damn thing about your ideas of right and wrong."

Zsolt grinned. "Right and wrong? What ideas? This guy was nuts." He saw Varya, apparently none the worse for wear aside from her scuffed arm, stretch and take in the midnight countryside. He shrugged, scrambled to his feet and set about cleaning up the mess.

Zsolt put his hands under the armpits of the psychotic thug and dragged the corpse out of the middle of the road. He stopped halfway, still bent over, and took a couple of deep breaths. Glancing up, he saw that Varya had already pulled the tall guy — or what was left of him — out of sight, into the rocks. Sometimes he wondered about the full extent of her strength and endurance.

"Need some help?" she called.

"Yeah," he grunted, "*now's* a nice time to think about that."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

He went on lugging the dead guy toward a dark, deep, final resting place off the road and down the side of the mountain. He tried to answer her with something clever, but he could only pant for breath.

"Take it easy," Varya said. "Just drop him right there. Forget about cleaning everything up. Nobody'll care about these two, trust me. What, you think a Legion patrol might come by at any minute?"

Zsolt put his right boot squarely in the small of the corpse's back, and when he shoved it over the edge, he imagined Varya, too, sailing off into the cool, quiet Swiss emptiness. He was glad they were getting near Basel. He'd had about half a liter too much of her already. He hadn't run into cryptic strangers and psychotic gunmen before he met her. And she was so goddamn Gifted she thought the forces of natural law got her permission every morning before the sun rose. He didn't care how attractive she was; he'd had to listen to her for too long. It wasn't so bad on the bike, but now he'd be trapped in the truck with her.

She looked at him without expression, her head tilted a little to one side. "We'll take the truck," she said.

"I know that, goddamn it," Zsolt muttered to himself.

"I'll drive," she said. Before he object, she held up the Concurso's keys on a ring with a wind-up, hopping plastic tongue attached to it. "In the first place, I know the way. I'm clear, remember?"

"*Morgás.*"

Varya laughed. "I can hear better than you think. A few seconds ago, it was 'I know that, goddamn it.' I missed one, though. That Hungarian word."

"Nothing," Zsolt grumbled, getting into the truck's passenger seat. "Just something my mother used to say."

"Your mother." Varya shook her head. She put the key in the switch, fastened her seat belt, but didn't speak to the engine. Instead, she turned to her companion. "Now, seriously," she said with an amused expression, "what are we forgetting?"

Zsolt tried to look innocent. Clairsentients couldn't read minds, he knew, but Varya still had an eerie knack for knowing what he was thinking. She probably knew he'd robbed the tall corpse, but that guy wasn't going to need his money again and Zsolt didn't think she cared about it. "We're forgetting something?"

Varya shook her head and jabbed him in the chest with a long, tapered forefinger. "*You're* forgetting something important, magyar — the other cryal."

He slammed the flat of his hand against the dashboard. "*Bassza meg*!" he shouted, irritated with himself. He stepped out into the cool night air again and slammed the car door behind him. He wondered how far they were from Basel after all, and he calmed down. He smelled the smoke and a floral sweetness in the air; he heard birds and insects, and realized how infrequently he paid attention to sensory details that didn't immediately affect his well-being. He'd pulled off the hovercycle's handlebar grip in moments and retrieved the second cryal from where he'd hidden it in the hollow tube.

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It was a slow Tuesday night, which would mean the early morning hours would be even quieter. But even so, Nurse Practitioner Elsje Pohl wasn't happy about going to work on what had been scheduled to be her evening off. It was a long drive — always longer getting there than getting home, for some reason — and nothing to look forward to all night but Ernst and his clumsy but effective fingers. Oh, and with a little luck, Old Testament Nurse would be called away, leaving Pohl with the keys to the meds locker. A shot of Sonneine and Pohl would tolerate *anything*.

Her electric Korean sedan hummed across the bridge over the Aare River. Directly in front of her loomed breathtaking views of the Hapsburg and Schwyzer Alps, neither of which Pohl had ever noticed. The road curved up into the mountains, through Schinznachdorf — a town no one in Switzerland knew anything about or cared to, as far as Pohl could determine — and then rumbled through an ancient tunnel under the Bötzberg. At the highest point along the road, just before it dropped again toward the River Rhine and the city of Basel itself, was another of those dull, identical villages, but this one touted the site of a formerly impressive monastery and the impressive Montressor Clinic, the world headquarters of the Æsculapian Order. In the very mortal words of Elsje Pohl, "big *verfickte* deal."

She changed into her uniform and signed in at the emergency room's processing desk. "Please," she whispered, "no lunatics," but the first thing she saw in the waiting room was a customer in a vidlid. Nurse Practitioner Pohl wished the guy a devastating case of colitis that would tragically and *agonizingly* end his life before a doctor could actually get to examine him. Vidlids had been very popular fifteen years ago, a sad fact that in itself warranted a statement in the patient's chart without a word being said. The lids covered the skull like floppy plastic helmets, in bright horrible greens and pinks, but that wasn't the worst part about them. There were little platforms on the crown of a vidlid that played holo-chip slideshows, as many as the fool wanted to show off: his dog or baby doing something unspeakably mundane, a clip of a team of local clog-dancers taken just before their execution, the guy himself demonstrating the pathetic limits of

what he believed to be a talent. Yet the holographic atrocities weren't the worst part — the vidlids had sound, *loud* sound. And between each vile, loathsome squib of "entertainment" were advertising holos, familiar ones that *everyone* hated, with—

"—must have told you about it."

Nurse Practitioner Pohl hadn't been paying attention. "Okay," she thought, "here we go." She took a deep breath. "Excuse me," she said to the customer — another guy, not the buffoon in the vidlid. To cover the fact that she hadn't been listening, she turned away briskly and went to a calendar posted at the other end of the processing station. She stared at it blurry-eyed for a moment, then came back to the newcomer with the dark mustache. "Sorry, sir," she muttered. "What was it again?"

Zsolt's expression didn't change. "The local clinic in China couldn't do much for my friend. They said we might only get help at the main clinic, in Basel. They promised they'd send you a file on it a couple of weeks ago. They must have told you about it."

"Which 'they,' sir," Pohl asked, "the doctors in China or the doctors in Basel?" She was just seeing how easily he got annoyed. She kind of liked the way he looked, but she wasn't in the market at the moment for another rotten temper on a four centimeter fuse.

There was a pause while Zsolt gathered strength and patience. "There should be a file from Zaozhuang. My name is John Zsolt."

Pohl looked up, glancing past Zsolt at his blonde friend. The woman filled out her shirt all right, but she looked old enough to have been this guy's history teacher. "I'll check on that right away," she said. "Spell that name for me, please." Zsolt did, and Pohl murmured each letter back at her desktop. "Do you have a tissue sample for us, Mr. Zsolt?"

While he took the second cryal from his jacket and put it on the counter between them, Pohl read the brief entry from the Zaozhuang clinic. At the end of the report was the code GOMER, which stood for "Get (This Person) Out of My Emergency Room!" Pohl said nothing. Her facial muscles didn't even twitch. She was a professional, and she'd seen that code hundreds of times before.

"If you'll take these forms and fill them out for us, please, Herr Zsolt," she said. "You're welcome to take a seat." She handed Zsolt a dpad with a light-pen clipped to it. As far as Elsje Pohl was concerned, that ended their business, unless she decided to get him away from the blonde with the big Zuckertorts. More likely, however, she'd never have to talk with him again, even if he rocketed through the intake forms and got them back to the processing desk within the hour.

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Dawn had finished giving the street beyond the double glass doors its special early morning look. Now it was just daytime out there, but it reminded Zsolt that they'd been sitting in the goddamn uncomfortable metal chairs for hours. There were hundreds of others waiting with them, too, but this was an emergency room, and even in the venerable Montressor Clinic, laser- and stab-wound patients got priority.

"If I'd known how long this was going to take," he said in a low voice, "I might've gotten a name of somebody to see here, made an appointment or something. Guess I wasn't thinking."

"You're tired, magyar," said Varya, who looked surprisingly fresh after a long hoverbike ride, an armed battle on the Swiss roadside, another drive toward Basel, and several hours of trying not to notice the variety show that was going on all around them in the clinic's reception area.

"Yeah," he said. "I'll be glad when we're done here. We'll go get something to eat, rent a cheap room and get some sleep. I'm not made out of high-impact banjyrene like you."

"My God, Montresor," she said.

"Huh?"

"This is the Montressor Clinic. 'My God, Montresor!' That's a quotation. Look it up." Varya stretched and rotated her neck, working out stiffness. "No, John, we're not made out of the same stuff, not at all, but we're not that different, either."

Zsolt grunted. "Here goes the loyal-magyar-as-psyq-superman speech again. This is where I came in. I'm going to look for a vending machine."

"What if they call your name—"

"While I'm away? You go with the doctor. You know as much about Pat as I do, and they have everything they need in the cryal. I wouldn't worry, though. I hear the average wait here is thirteen hours. We haven't been here seven. Settle in. You should've brought something to read."

Varya rolled her eyes. "I could always eavesdrop on the soap opera next to us—the little old guy and the doll teenage girl."

"She's a doll?"

Varya rolled her eyes again. "Get me something to drink, okay, something with bubbles in it."

Zsolt walked away, shaking his head. There were sick people in that room, and some of them beyond the help of even all the psions in the world.

A corridor took Zsolt to another corridor, and then a third hallway led to a lobby. A pleasant young man seated in a circle of glossy black obsidian was filled with regret that there were no vending machines in the Montressor Clinic. There was a cafeteria, but they could lose their chance if they were eating when their names were called. They could eat one at a time, though. Zsolt thanked the guy and headed back to the ER reception area. "They could eat one at a time." What a team they were turning into.

Zsolt used what little of his charm remained to talk a nurse out of a small bottle of sparkling spring water. He presented it to Varya like a small but hard-won trophy. "That's it," he said. "We eat afterward, or start gnawing on our neighbors."

Varya looked at the wizened old guy on the other side of her and shuddered. He was talking in a loud voice—to himself, to his teenage-girl toy, to Varya? "Sometimes you shouldn't say those funny things," she told Zsolt. "Sometimes they're not so funny. You should shut up until you can tell the difference." But then she leaned nearer and kissed his cheek. "Thanks for the water, magyar."

"Hey," he said and shrugged, at the moment the full extent of his eloquence. Her kiss startled him mightily.

Hours went by, and the racking coughs of the elderly woman behind Zsolt past, replaced by the throat-clogging stink of gangrene. Zsolt and Varya changed seats, but there wasn't a more pleasant section. It was like swapping steaming boulders in Hell.

Across the aisle to the left, where a young man sprawled on a gurney, huddling beneath a thin sheet for hours, Zsolt now saw Pat. Pat hadn't turned or moved since Zsolt's earlier vision of the room in Zaozhuang. His friend was still a twisted figure under his worn blanket.

Then Zsolt understood: This time, Pat was only an image on an Æon Trinity monitoring device. Two men and a woman in uniform watched and murmured into recording devices. Each uniform had a small patch: "Triton Division." What was Triton Division, he wondered. What did the Æon Trinity care about Pat in the first place? Zsolt shook his head, clearing away what *had* to have been a dream.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Eleven A.M.," Varya said. "Almost lunchtime. We've been here nearly twelve hours."

"Should be soon, then."

"Should be soon." Neither looked confident.

"Okay," said Zsolt, "we've been through this whole thing, and we've waited here all night together. Tell me again why you're here."

She turned toward him and stared, her eyebrows raised. "Didn't the ad say I needed someone to get me safely to Basel?"

"Yeah."

"Didn't I say that I expected not to answer questions, especially that one?"

"Yeah."

"Well, hell, then, John."

"Well, hell yourself. You don't need *anybody* to get you safely anywhere. I'd be willing to bet you're the only reason *I'm* still alive."

Varya didn't answer that immediately. "You remember that ad, magyar? The one where I advertised for a gentleman-protector to get me to Switzerland, and that the

pay was good and no funny stuff?"

Zsolt frowned. He didn't understand her point. "Yeah, 'course I remember it."

"Where was it? What newsflat? Chipzine? Where'd you see it?"

He thought back. It must've been at Kaylee and Tavo's flat in Zaozhuang. He and Varya had taken a suborbital from Beijing to Rome. "I don't remember which paper, Varya," he said. "I wasn't paying attention to stuff like that. I was thinking about how bad Pat was doing and everything."

"John, look at me." Her voice was even lower, and very dramatic. "There was no newsflat. There was no ad. I faked it."

"What the hell—"

"I'm a clairsentient, okay? I told you that right at the beginning. I didn't tell you that I'm one of the Mashriqi, the order's administrative council. Some people think we're not the best organized of the psi orders, but I promise you: We have our resources. More than you'll ever need, with any luck. I'd heard about you, did a little investigation, and saw that you have tremendous latent talents. I wanted you with us, with the ISRAns. I...I faked a 'zine ad transmission to bring you on board."

Zsolt's dark brows drew together. "*Gazember*!" he cried, not caring who might turn to look at him.

"Now, don't get mad, John. There are reasons, big reasons—wheels within wheels. It starts with Pat, of course, but there's so much more, and so little time—"

"Goddamn it, Varya! You think you're such a great schemer, but it all boils down to 'somebody's gotta carry the message through hostile country.' But *not me!*"

Varya took a deep breath and let it out. "We left from Beijing, went through customs there and again in Rome. Then we traveled north through Italy, across the border into Switzerland, staying on small roads — your style — till we got ourselves here. Right?"

"Damn right."

"Gave our IDs dozens of times, right?"

"Uh huh. What's the amazing surprise this time?"

Varya looked deeply into Zsolt's eyes. "Magyar, answer me. What's my full name? You must've heard it—"

Zsolt shook his head. "No, I've never heard it. Okay, so you've got magical Gifted psyq superhuman powers, but I never liked you people anyway. What makes this so special for you? It's important to me because I promised I'd do this for Pat. What are you getting out of it? A new car for recruiting me?"

She stood and stretched. Despite his indignant, irate feelings, it was good to watch Varya stretch. "John," she said, "we need to have a long talk when there's time."

"Sure," he said, "because I don't feel like talking now, okay? I'll be all right. I just don't want to say anything that'll spoil the seduction."

Varya smiled, tried to make herself more comfortable, and fell asleep almost immediately.

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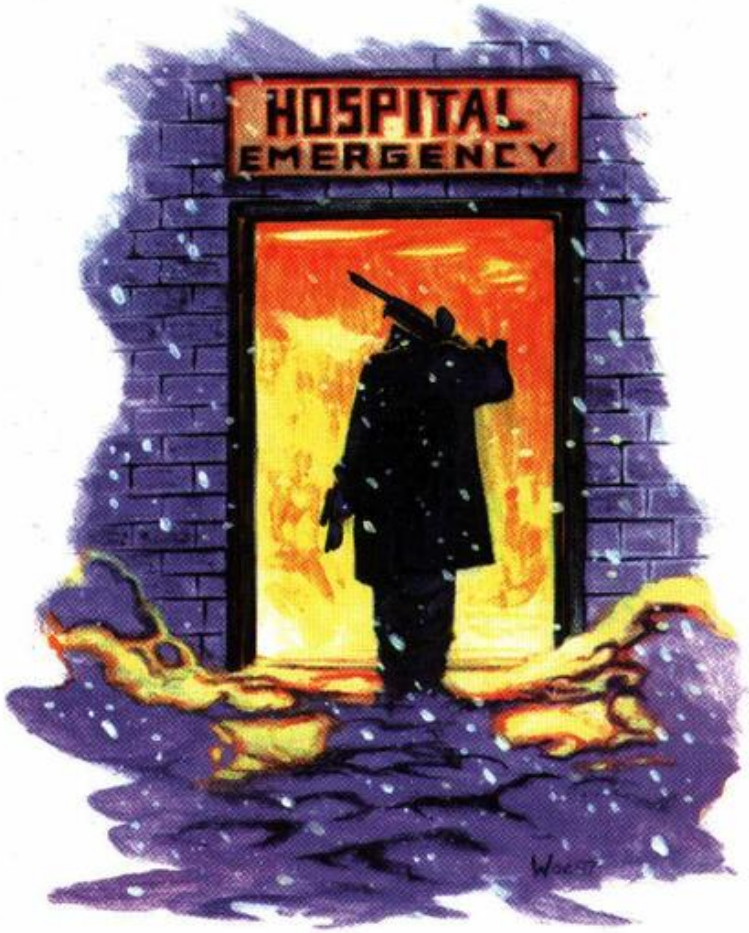
After seventeen hours, Zsolt had had enough. From the new duty nurse — Nurse Practitioner Elsje Pohl had escaped to breakfast and sleep and peace a long while ago — he confirmed that no record existed at the Montressor Clinic of Pat's cryal; no record existed of Pat at all, or of John Zsolt, either. He thanked the nurse and left the building without waking Varya.

He proceeded to the main post office on Freie Strasse, where a package waited for him at General Delivery. It was the small parcel he'd addressed to himself and attached money to, and then dropped into the poorbox at Great St. Bernard. The monks had taken the money gratefully and sent the parcel on its way. Swinging his shoulders and feeling the stiff muscles in his back, Zsolt tore open the box and slid a third cryal into the palm of his hand. A quiet binging sound informed him at the same time that he had new email on his minicomp. He didn't feel like reading it now.

He drove back to the clinic's parking area, opened the back of the van, and unclipped the minicomp. The email was from Kaylee, dated two days ago. Pat had passed away. Tavo was appearing beyond Kaylee's shoulder. "Quit," Zsolt said in a husky voice. He'd play it all another time.

He reached into the back of the truck and retrieved the Banji autorifle and the laser carbine that had belonged briefly to Chiavenna's incompetent hoods. Carrying the weapons slung over his shoulders, he found his way to the ER reception area once more.



"Rise and shine, Varya," he said, kicking her foot gently. "We've got an appointment with Doktor Zweidler."

Varya woke quickly, her eyes growing larger when she saw Zsolt's hardware. As she opened her mouth to speak, he tossed her the laser carbine. "Figure it out before you need to use it," he said. He didn't look back at her, knowing she'd follow. He headed straight for the reception desk.

"You need a stabbing or a gunshot wound to get some attention around here, huh?" he said. He let fly a few rounds into the front of the desk as the attendant dove for cover. "I hope that isn't just fiberboard, because I really don't want to hurt anybody."

The gunfire brought out a security guard from a back office. The man wore the white uniform of the Æsculapian Order's security staff, but he had the weathered features of a mercenary. That earned Zsolt's respect. The moment was spoiled a little when the Hungarian realized that the guard moved like a robot vacuum cleaner in some Saturday-morning holotoon. The guy's barrel chest, huge forearms, tiny head, and the way he moved smoothly over the floor made the guard seem more like a "hovergoon" than a human being.

"Drop," Zsolt shouted in German. The security guard ignored the command, spat something in a language from one of the Free States east of the Ukraine, and grabbed at Zsolt's trigger hand. Zsolt ripped the weapon free again and smashed into the guard's skull. The security guard crumpled. "Stay close behind me, honey," he said over his shoulder. "The docs are bound to have some real security, psyqs or maybe even Legionnaires. You're all the backup I've got." He waited. Varya didn't answer.

Zsolt went cold at the silence, and turned quickly. Varya was right where she was supposed to be, covering him with the laser carbine. She gave him a long, slow, warm smile.

A grim-faced orderly came toward them, ignoring the weapons. "Dr. Zweidler wants to meet with you in his office back this way. He doesn't want any more confusion in the waiting area."

Zsolt had dismissed the sedated and sick occupying the waiting area. "Those poor bastards out there didn't notice anything," Zsolt presumed.

"That's the truth," Varya assured him.

"Follow me," said the orderly.

They walked down a narrow corridor that was decked out with luxurious marble-gray carpeting. Zsolt hoped he wouldn't get blood all over it. About halfway along, Varya glanced at a door they passed with the name "Delemont" on it.

The orderly opened an office at the end of the hall — a plain door without a nameplate on it — and went in, followed by Zsolt and Varya. "Dr. Zweidler," he said.

Zweidler looked up at the orderly and nodded. "You can leave us, Fritz," he said. They waited for the man to go out and shut the door behind him. Then Zweidler looked at his visitors, giving them a puzzled frown. He stood up and came around his desk. "Ach, weh, then this is our John Zsolt, all the way from Zaozhuang. How is China? It's been many years since I've visited there. But, of course, of all nations, China—"

There was a low throbbing sound, a low static screech, and the acrid smell of burnt hair. Zweidler raised a well-manicured hand to the smoking remains of a lock.

"Step back," Varya said.

Zsolt smiled at her, puzzled but determined not to show it. "You figured out the safety system on that two-handed flashlight."

"He was using vitakinesis to sedate you," she explained. "I thought I should break it up. If you shook hands with him, he'd have you counting backward from one hundred, and you'd wake up in a semi-private room with nice flowers and a visit from all the wrong people."

Zsolt nodded, but he didn't look at her. He'd heard the docs could do such things; it shouldn't surprise him that their proxy would try it on some wild-eyed assailant. "Why don't you sit back down, Dr. Zweidler. You know who I am. You know why I'm here. What's wrong with my friend? Why couldn't they tell us anything in the local clinics we tried?"

The old man shrugged. "So many questions. And you deserve answers. You know what are these Aberrants?"

"Yeah, everybody does. Nasty mutant suckers raiding our colonies and cities."

Zweidler's eyes flicked from Zsolt to Varya and back again. "Also, then, the taint?"

Zsolt's expression turned thoughtful. He shook his head.

The old doctor spread his hands. "There could be some of these...Aberrants on Earth here and there, alone or in groups. For what reasons that make sense? Our beautiful world *tainted*, you would say, by their very presence." He reached into a pocket of his white lab coat and brought out the second cryal, the one Zsolt had surrendered at the ER's reception desk. "Your friend...his illness—"

"Can you help him?"

Zweidler's eyes looked brighter, as if they'd filled with tears. He held up the cryal again. "His illness is of this Aberrant taint. It is nothing natural, nothing anyone has ever seen before. It isn't a germ or a virus. Now, today, we are helpless."

The Hungarian closed his eyes and leaned back against the wall. "Then why in the name of God were you trying to stop us?"

"Stop you?" Zweidler asked.

"How the fucking hell do you think you got that cryal?"

Varya spoke up, her voice calm. "We were attacked on the road. All they wanted was the cryal. John was smart enough to have brought two, but your people here got that one, too. He trusted them, I suppose. For a cynic, he's too romantic for his own good."

Zweidler interrupted. "I don't understand. Yes, I knew Herr Zsolt was on his way, but I gave no orders to have you stopped, to have you *assaulted*. The entire world knows I would never permit that. My staff I've chosen carefully, one person at a time, and no one in this organization would allow such a thing, either. This whole idea is deeply disturbing."

Zsolt opened his eyes. "You got a tall thin woman working for you, wears dark glasses at night, lots of black leather, much too aware of her image for her own good?"

Zweidler looked helplessly to Varya. "New illnesses," he said in a tired voice. "No one is ready to hear about them yet, about how little we know of this taint. We must act responsibly. It would be so easy to cause panic, and that would certainly be disastrous, a deadly mistake. We must study and learn, and we must make the world ready to hear and understand our findings."

Varya let out a sigh. "You're saying there are brand-new diseases popping up all over the damn place because of the Aberrants, because of the taint they spread, and so far you Æsculapians are still standing around with your thumbs up your asses wondering what you can do about them."

Zweidler shook his head. "We need you," he said softly. "People like Herr Zsolt, people with true latent talents. We're always looking for men and women who have the abilities to become new healers. Think of the gift you have, the great gift! I can see it shining from within you. Join us, Herr Zsolt. Maybe it will be you who heals your friend."

Zsolt's eyes widened slightly, and he looked from Zweidler to Varya. There was a moment of solemn silence, with just the rattle of the air conditioning audible in the room. "You almost had me," Zsolt said at last, "but you took it just a little too far. Pat died two days ago and you knew it; you and your Æon Trinity friends. I'm not going to let people — psyqs or neutrals — manipulate me anymore." He turned and left the office, missing whatever passed between the doctor and Varya.

Varya smiled when she caught up with him in the hallway. "You played old Doc Zweidler just right! You're learning, magyar!" She put her arms around his neck. He felt her breasts press against his chest, and smelled the clean sandalwood fragrance of her skin.

"I meant you, too," he told her. Zsolt's rage was gone, but the anger remained. He reached up and pulled away from her arms. "You wanted to get to Basel, well, there's probably a bus in front of the building that'll take you right downtown."

Zsolt didn't know what kind of response to expect, but Varya just laughed.

He shook his head and walked away, still carrying the Banji automatic. None of the clinic's staff stopped him from leaving, but he was too wrapped up in his own thoughts to realize it. Zsolt tried to remember where he'd left the truck. He wouldn't decide what to do next until it was plainly in front of him.

>>> <<<

Later that night, Zsolt pulled the Concurso off the road and got out. He stared up at the cloudy, starless sky and felt a sudden chill. It wasn't the altitude or the wind. It was a cold feeling that had risen from deep within him. His minicomp sat on the damp earth beside him. Zsolt's eyes were closed, but he heard Pat's voice: "Please let me ask this one last time: *Remember me, John.*"

Somebody in China explained to him that there were only two things to do when certain diseases invaded the body. The first was to cut the disease out completely. The second was to strengthen the body so it could fight for itself. Zsolt knew that there were some diseases that couldn't be cut out, not completely. The world was sick — tainted — and the clears and the docs and all of the other psion orders were supposed to be dedicated to strengthening the world's body.

Instead, they seemed more interested in vying with each other for status and recruits. Zsolt heard the stories of these saintly Gifted defending humanity, but he'd

seen that they were all too human. He relied on them to help Pat, and they failed.

Still, just because the psyqs hadn't found a cure didn't mean there wasn't one. And just because Pat was dead didn't mean Zsolt would give up on his friend. Varya and Zweidler claimed Zsolt was a latent, that he could become a psion. As much as he hated and mistrusted them and their manipulations, Zsolt realized that becoming a psion might be the best way to honor his friend's memory. He didn't trust the docs; they'd lied to him from the beginning. Although Varya stuck by him through this mess, she just wanted to recruit him, too. He knew little enough about the other orders besides what he'd seen on holovids and in chipzines — who knew if they were any better?

Zsolt couldn't deny the impact of the strange visions he'd had, though. They'd helped him, revealed things he wouldn't have learned otherwise. Just imagine if he could harness the full potential of clairsentience! If he became a psion, Zsolt might discover what the others couldn't — or wouldn't. He would no longer be a pawn.

This would be his memorial to Pat, the proof of his loyalty. "No," he whispered, "I won't forget."

Zsolt didn't even wait for morning. He got into the Concurso and turned it back toward the Montressor Clinic. Maybe he could find Varya, still looking for that bus into Basel.

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INTO THE NEW MILLENIUM

A LOOK AT THE EVENTS THAT HAVE SHAPED THE WORLD OF THE 22ND CENTURY.

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective* © 2120 OBC

In looking to our past, we see our future.
— Proxy Otha Herzog, ISRA

The past two decades of this new century have seen more change and progress than had occurred in the preceding 100 years. The tremendous strife humanity suffered in the 21st century, from global warfare to political upheaval, from economic collapse to social change, served to temper us. Now, in 2120, humans are hardy, dauntless creatures with opportunities that previous generations could scarcely have dreamed.

It is an exciting time to be alive. Humanity reaches ever further into space, establishing and expanding colonies and orbital stations in distant solar systems. Technology is constantly on the rise, resulting in tremendous scientific breakthroughs such as interstellar jump ships and other wonders of biotechnology. Alien beings walk among us, teaching us their strange ways, and learning ours.

Yet more important than all of these things, science has discovered the key to understanding the universe, which, ironically, was locked away in our minds all along. Psionic powers, the powers of the mind, are a reality, and the people who have fully realized them are known as psions. After centuries of fantasizing about mental powers, humanity can now move objects, read minds, ignite fires and even perform the most delicate of surgery with but a thought.

While the layman marvels at the wonders of the psions, scientists marvel at the insights into our universe that psionic powers give us. Noetic science, the investigation of this phenomenon, theorizes that psi operates on a fundamental level of energy referred to as the subquantum universe or implicate order; psionic energy exists on a basic physical level even under quarks and tachyons. The discovery of this energy has revolutionized modern science and changed the way we understand the universe.

Psionic energy particles are said to permeate all things, from asteroids to grass, from alien races to all human beings. They're everywhere and affect all things. Their discovery, noetic scientists say, confirms that there is a fifth elemental force at work in the universe, along with gravity, weak and strong nuclear forces, and electromagnetic energy. This Holy Grail of science may be the missing link that completes a true Grand Unification Theory. Psionic energy, the subquantum universe, the implicate order — whatever you want to call it — resonates through everything and is therefore the unifying force between all things, living or not. All things are said to be a part of the universe, and the universe is supposed to be part of all things. Rather highbrow, but now that science theorizes about the bonds between everything, we hope to unlock the remaining secrets of the universe.

The proof of psi allows us to go beyond theory and conjecture. As if created by some benevolent hand, the psions have arisen and are capable of perceiving the essence of the universe. Their powers allow them to project their minds, manipulate the energy particles around them, and recognize the ties between themselves and asteroids, grass, aliens and other human beings. While scientists ponder the ebb and flow of universal particles, psions see them, feel them and direct them. The psions are therefore our tools for discovering the truth of reality. They are our leaders in what may be an age of answers.

It is indeed a wonderful time to be alive, as we finally unravel the greatest mysteries of all time. What is the meaning of life? Why are we here? What is our purpose? Can we define the mind and even the soul in terms of subquantum psionic particles? The Grand Unification Theory and the psions could hold the answers.

Yet as we stand on the brink of discovery, we also stand on the brink of destruction. Humanity's greatest threat, the Aberrants, have returned. These erstwhile-heroes-turned-apocalyptic-destroyers were almost the ruin of humanity. They arose innocently enough in the 21st century as beings possessed of amazing powers and a desire to ply them for the good of the human race. But their strength came from a genetic anomaly, a tumorous mutation labeled the Mazarin-Rashoud node. Their powers grew immensely as their mutation festered. Before long, the Aberrants were out of control, completely insane.

Humanity defended itself, and the Aberrant War was the result. The war ended almost 60 years ago with the Aberrants' departure to places literally beyond the stars. While the horror and devastation they caused are felt even today, it was the threat that they would someday return that was our greatest fear. Now our fear is a reality.

Humanity faces the Aberrant menace again, but our hardships of the past 60 years give us strength against our resurgent enemies. The decade following the Aberrant War, called the Crash, was truly the darkest time in human history. Much of the world's financial and ecological resources were drained. Half of Earth's arable land was corrupt and infertile. The OpNet, the global computer network, was in ruins and a staggering amount of recorded information on history, culture and society was lost. Millions died, not only in the war, but in the ensuing riots and chaos. Untold billions in damage were done to cities and nations around the world.

The Crash saw nation squabble with nation over table scraps. Political and religious differences flared to fervent hatred. North America and Europe, the two regions hit hardest by the Aberrant War, were relegated to the status of second-class powers. China and Brazil, and later the newly formed United African Nations, stepped forward to lead the world into the 22nd century.

In the waning years of the 21st century, Earth's nations made an effort to put three decades of strife behind them. Space was the new frontier, where anyone from an individual to an entire population could start anew. Governments and corporations leapt to the stars, creating

orbital research stations and mining platforms. They were followed by hardy explorers and colonists eager for a second chance.

Since the second Space Age began in 2024, humanity has conquered Luna; launched shining orbital cities around the inner planets; mined rich ores from Mercury, Jupiter's moons and from the asteroid belt; initiated terraforming on Mars; and even advanced beyond our solar system to new worlds.

Now clouds darken this new dawn. No one can forget what they were doing on January 28, 2104, when the Aberrants returned. Their attack on Research Outpost Vesta, beyond Saturn, came without warning. The viciousness of that assault was matched only by the horrific degree to which the Aberrants had mutated. Forty years in the void had transformed them into bizarre things from a Saturday night holovid. But these monsters are real.

The Aberrants have changed — grown more powerful — but so have we. The strides we have made to rebuild Earth civilization, restore what was destroyed in the first Aberrant War, and extend our reach into space make humans a force to be reckoned with.

And this time we have the psions — nothing less than the power of mind over matter — whose powers are the product of natural human evolution, not genetic mutation. Ever since the first psions appeared to combat an Aberrant assault in 2106, these people have been humanity's greatest defenders, and their numbers have swelled. While currently numbering less than one percent of the eight billion human souls scattered across Earth and the near stars, these protectors are a powerful force.

In fact, without the psions we would never have made first contact with an alien race, the Qin. Though they had not yet developed interstellar travel, the Qin had created a civilization to rival Earth's. These beings are at once intriguingly similar and disturbingly different from us. Yet aside from the countless mysteries that exist between our races, humans and Qin share a fundamental nature: curiosity about the universe, and a staunch desire to defend it against all hostile beings.

Aberrants are the enemies of both humans and Qin. But much less understood than Aberrants are the pseudo-reptilian aliens, the Chromatics. Their raid in 2113 on the Karroo Mining Colony near the Crab Nebula was unannounced, and as unprovoked as any Aberrant assault. Humanity does not yet know the Chromatics' motives, and we won't until we re-establish contact with our outposts lying trapped and vulnerable in the distant reaches of space.

The forces that endanger humanity in the 22nd century are horrifying. But if our achievements and discoveries of the past 20 years are any indication, we are prepared to contend with any threat. As the psions rally and the new jump ships are brought online, we will restore contact with our distant outposts, take the fight back to the Aberrants, and end their menace once and for all. Only then can humanity and the psions safely explore the unifying truths of the universe and find our rightful place in it.

HOPE • SACRIFICE • UNITY

In a universe of dangerous interplanetary travel, first contact with strange, alien races, the emergence of mysterious psionic powers among humanity, and the rediscovered menace of the Aberrant horde that endangers all life, the Æon Trinity is a force for good, dedicated to the protection of Earth. In a time of great uncertainty and apprehension, Æon stands at the forefront of humanity, both protecting and leading the way into a bold future. We lead the way in hopes of unifying all people to face the destiny that lies before us.

ÆON TRINITY

Congratulations, citizen, you are humanity's greatest hope. You are one of the Gifted; a psion, a champion of Earth and a defender of everything that has ever been. Through the blessings of the proxies, who are the leaders of the psion orders, and the graces of the powers that be, you have developed the astonishing ability to perform miracles with only your thoughts, will and strength of character. Your psionic powers allow you to see the fundamental forces of the universe, and affect the cosmic balance of things.

This is no minor responsibility. Now that the Aberrants, your heroic predecessors-turned-corrupt, have returned to assault the Earth again, you are essential to the protection of all life. Now that humanity explores the mysteries of deep space, you are the spearhead of those forays into the unknown. Now that science realizes that psionic energy is the fifth force in the Grand Unification Theory that shapes nature itself, you have the power to reveal the secrets of the universe and to discover the role that humanity must play in it. Yours is the most glorious duty and honor.

You are not alone, though. We are the Æon Trinity, a society dedicated to the protection and service of humanity for the past 200 years. Your psionic order, the group that unlocked your ability to channel psi energy and that trained you to use those powers, is your surrogate parent — your adopted family. The Æon Trinity is your "godparent," your tutor, advisor and counselor in this, the greatest responsibility, challenge and adventure you have ever faced.

The Æon Trinity was founded in the 20th century and has worked with the governments and societies of Earth ever since to help humanity fulfill its destiny. Now in the 22nd century, we counsel, represent and coordinate virtually every world and space government, organized religion, metacorporation and psi order. Indeed, Æon is the right hand of the world's decision makers, and always has the good of all people at heart. The Æon Trinity does not control any party or individual, but influences them toward a common goal: unity. Æon is a society that you as a psion can turn to and rely on in the hard and happy times ahead.

Æon services humanity through three branches, each of which facilitates functions essential to the Trinity and your order. These three divisions were established at the organization's inception, and although their duties and operating parameters have changed with time, they retain their original designations in honor of those who came before. Neptune is Æon's administrative branch. It is staffed mainly by "neutrals" or nonpsionic people, and is supported by psions and some proxies, such as the leader of your order, all of whom seek to coordinate the unity of humanity and its allies for the achievement of peace and prosperity. Triton is our research and investigation department. Its members study space and our alien allies and enemies, keep a vigilant watch for Aberrant attacks and solve crimes committed against humanity. Proteus is the hand of the Trinity, the operations team that consists of psions and special agents who actively protect Earth and its peoples.

As a psion and ally of Æon, you may belong to one or more of these branches, and are thus one of the guardians of our age. The Trinity has members in countries throughout the world and across explored space. You are counseled with and deferred to in all matters of defense and the common good, from defending against the Aberrant men-

ace to receiving ambassadors of alien races, such as the Qin. You are a power for change, a means to achieve unity and strength.

The Æon Trinity is the catalyst that holds the psi orders, Earth and space governments, as well as humans and aliens together. Æon is an earthly benefactor, if you will. But the Trinity did not always have this honorable and weighty role in the universe, or even among humanity. To understand Æon's purpose and direction in modern times, you must look back to early 20th-century Chicago.

Æon's founder, Maxwell Anderson Mercer, inventor, businessman and millionaire, established what was then called the Æon Society for Gentlemen. Mercer had a vision of the future, even in those simple times. He understood that humanity's development up to that era had taken a slow and gradual path, but with upcoming innovations in technology, introductions of social reforms and the blossoming of human potential, upstanding men and women, the brilliant and motivated, would be needed to lead humanity into the future. This society recognized the dawning of a new age, one of hope, to which it could give direction. And though the society was perhaps named in the naive spirit of an innocent time, the changes that it anticipated would indeed come about, whether in a thousand or a handful of years.

ÆON SOCIETY FOR GENTLEMEN C.1925 MERCER COLLECTION

Mercer's vision proved accurate when the first extranormal people emerged near the end of the 20th century. These rising stars were new and vibrant, as yet untouched by corruption. They were the protectors of their era, and the Æon Society worked with them to improve the lot of 20th-century life. It was a new Golden Age of heroes and potential — of hope.

And yet, that hope was dashed. Something in the inherent being of Earth's heroes went awry. The abilities that marked the first champions of the Æon Society changed with those who followed. Powers grew greater than had ever been known before. The inventiveness and wisdom that founded the society were abandoned in favor of raw power as new individuals arose and frowned on Æon and its goals. These beings, who became known as Aberrants, wallowed in their own abilities and used them to satisfy their own desires, without a unifying vision of what was best for humanity.

Æon sought to control these Aberrants, to reason with them and give them purpose, but the beings were drunk on their own power. Æon lent its resources to the space program in the hopes that the Aberrants' mounting abuses could not affect humanity off Earth, but it was too late. The Aberrants' increasing powers had outstripped anyone's expectations — even sanity itself — and the abusers lost control of themselves.

We are all familiar with the tragic Aberrant War, which resulted in the deaths of millions of humans and mere handfuls of Aberrants. Yet from that horrible loss, good did arise. Æon recognized its next mission for the good of humanity: sacrifice. If the Aberrants were to be stopped and humanity preserved, the society would have to give wholly of itself. Society members in China were instrumental in the development of arms sufficient to force the Aberrants to stand down. Special agents in the society who stood against the Aberrants reasoned with them, convincing them to seek alternatives to life on Earth, places where they could use their powers and fulfill their own destinies, not at the expense of beings less fortunate. To lead Earth's tormentors by example, many of Æon's agents left with them for other worlds via the strange warping ability a handful of Aberrants possessed. It was, indeed, a time of sacrifice for all.

In the years following the Aberrant War, the remaining members of the now-galvanized Æon Covenant — a group of people that was bound by the example set by those who sacrificed themselves for Earth's good — dedicated itself to rebuilding Earth society. The depredations of the war had left many areas in ruins, and those lucky enough to survive struggled to start their lives again. The ongoing sacrifices of Æon's members went far in restoring the once-beautiful Earth. Records of our cultures and collective history were gathered and restored after the massive destruction of the OpNet. A decade of research by Neptune and Triton divisions restored a global electronic library by piecing together paper texts and fragmented computer files. Urban centers blossomed as people were gathered together where resources and programs could be shared by all. Others preferred the isolation of rural existence, and were let go with society's blessing, but, sadly, were beyond the shelter of Æon's wing.

Space, once again, proved to be humanity's best hope for new life. The defeated Earth needed time to heal its wounds. Space offered resources that humanity needed desperately, not only housing and opportunities for work on the many stations and colonies that were not damaged in the war, but resources that could not be plumbed from an overtaxed planet.

Æon's role in this second pioneering of space was one of assistance and support. In these closed communities, human rights and needs had to be protected. Justice had to be upheld. The mistakes and abuses of the past had to be remembered, if for nothing other than to say, "never again." Thus with Æon's help, humanity and Earth were made whole again.

It was then that humanity, when it was most ready, as if in a cosmic cycle, was invited to take its next bold step into the future. The psionic proxies, humans with incredible powers bestowed by strange patrons, emerged and contacted those people — now called psions — who would become their agents in the next great age. The proxies' gifts awoke powers that had not been seen among humans in two centuries. These powers were similar to those wielded by the founders of the Æon Society in the early 20th century, before

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

Subject: Chinese space program and Aberrant resurgence
From: Proxy Rebecca Bue Li, Ministry of Psionic Affairs
To: Dana Boresheltov, Æon Trinity, Neptune Division
Encryption: SPE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 11:13:42 9.12.2105

Agent Boresheltov, first my thanks for your encouragement of the Chinese government to recognize my native Philippines and its significance in Chinese policy and necessity to the Chinese space program. Now that two Chinese outposts have been attacked, and my order counsels the Chinese government, I plan to take the initiative in response to the return of the Aberrants.

As the Chinese posed the Ultimatum to rid the Earth of Aberrants decades ago, so will we do it again today. This time we will do it with the psions, and the Ministry shall lead the way. I plan to dispatch Ministry telepaths to the last known Aberrant attack site to issue a new ultimatum: Leave Earth alone once and for all, or be destroyed.

Chinese destroyer convoys are already dispatched and prepared to stage strikes if the Aberrant response is hostile. Events are set in motion. I trust you will communicate word to the other proxies…should we need them.

the transgressions of the Aberrants. Yet the powers were also new and unique; refined and powerful, and certainly more widespread. Humanity had reached a new stage of development, it seemed, and Æon was there to give it direction. Æon brought the proxies together, pooled their resources, and helped introduce their orders to an awestruck world.

This perhaps is a third Golden Age, for it marks a new direction and purpose for humanity: to unite, to rally behind Earth's new heroes and form one people for the advancement of all.

The need for that unity is made all the more clear by scientific research into psionic powers themselves. Noetic research suggests that psi powers tap into a previously unknown subquantum energy, a universe that unites all aspects of what we consider reality. Like gravity, psionics prove to be an undeniable force of nature, one that affects all things. And you, as a psion, wield it. The secrets of the universe are in the palm of your hand.

Here, then, is an opportunity to follow new leaders, to unite all countries, to bring together all organizations under the banner of the psions, their orders and Æon. No single part of the whole — psion, human, country, colony, order — would be above the rest. A new Golden Age, indeed.

And as if to confirm this need, as if to ratify this show of hands for unity, our old enemies have returned. The Aberrants are back and loom at the borders of known space, just as they promised when the last, spiteful one of them was shown the way to a better life on his own.

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

Subject: Chinese space program and Aberrant resurgence
From: Dana Boresheltov, Æon Trinity, Neptune Division
To: Rebecca Bue Li, Ministry of Psionic Affairs
Encryption: DSE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 03:18:11 9.12.2105

Negative, Proxy Bue Li. I repeat, negative. The Chinese destroyer fleet will stand down. This was not part of the prepared arrangement. Æon Trinity has precise plans for the integration of the psion orders. You will not pre-empt those plans, nor stage any action against Aberrant attacks without expressed commands from the Trinity. You are advised to remember the means by which your order was recently recognized by the Chinese government. Furthermore, as you have obviously used your abilities to integrate your order directly into the Chinese space program, I advise you to review the reasons why the Chinese fleet stood down after the Aberrant War…and consider who helped them make that decision.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PSION

— Orgotek psion Carlos Peralta, recipient of Commendation for Valor, as interviewed by Dazyl Grenich, *Lifestyles* © 2120 MMI

Do I get scared? Sure, we all do. We have these powers, but we're just like everyone else — we have families, friends, pets. That's why we do it all. I want to protect my family, my country — my species! Psions use their powers to protect Earth and everyone in space. You would do the same if you had the chance, what with the Aberrants attacking and everything you love at stake.

What will I do next? Orgotek had a big part in getting the jump ships created — we can finally go back into deep space after the teleporters disappeared and the Aberrants cut us off from our colonies. I want to be a part of that. No one knows what's happened out there. They say the Chromatics and some other alien race are still out there, doing who knows what.

ISRA wants to get to the Qin home-world to get the ambassadors stranded here back to their people, and to bring our ambassadors home.

Of course, there are the Aberrants, too. I've only seen three, and came within reach of one.... It's a hard thing to do...but if I don't do it, who's going to protect my family — or yours?

And new enemies have arisen as well. A violent race of aliens known so far only as the Chromatics has staged raids on our distant colonies and space outposts. What is this new menace and what is it capable of? We don't yet know, but rest assured that we will find out.

Now is indeed a time of unity, for humanity and for any alien allies whom we can rally to the cause. With your help, and the help of Æon, we will come together to face our common foe. With our combined strength, we will reunite with our colonies orphaned in deep space by Aberrant attacks. We will travel to the worlds of our alien allies from whom the Aberrants have severed us. The third age, the age of unity, is upon us. It is up to us — and you — to achieve it.

SUBJECT: DAMN!

From: R. Linsey Marsden
To: P. Archer
Transmission type: textfile
Encryption: DSE
Date: 14:02:49 11.6.2119

"The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

This kind of propaganda worries me, yeh? Sad part is, normal folks know so little about Æon that they don't know enough bad about the group to doubt its word. If I hacked into the OpNet routers tomorrow with proof that I was responsible for the greatest events of the past 20 years, folks would flock to me, the desperate ones anyway. Now bring that out 200 years and imagine the following that the Æon Trinity could generate.

Do we want to make an issue, though? Æon certainly isn't everything that it claims to be here, but it's not a bad thing, either. I know it doesn't call the shots for my order, but it does whisper them, and I'd rather not speak up against the very people who cut my checks.

But, still — "Æon is the hope of the future?" I don't remember any Æon agents being around when that Aberrant got the jump on my team and killed Valez. Æon was nowhere in sight when the jump ship orbital-manufacturing platform was blown into so much plasteel and biopaste.

As far as I can tell, Æon is little more than a PR firm for the psi orders and a few countries and colonies. It's no stronger than we are, and we're no stronger than it (and maybe we need each other as a result). I do know that the orders are out there in the light and taking the heat from the public when things go wrong, while Æon sits in the shadows and plays at calling the shots.

PSI

Psionic powers have been relegated to the realms of myth and speculation for centuries. As civilization progressed into the modern age and technology came to dominate popular culture, such speculation was polarized between scientific skeptics and those who believed fully in powers of the mind.

People were enthralled by anyone proclaiming such fantastic abilities, as though there was a deep subconscious need to believe that things like telepathy were possible. A close-minded scientific community refused to acknowledge the existence of psi powers, debunking frauds whenever possible. Strange incidents and inexplicable demonstrations of power galvanized believers, but were deemed unreliable by "expert authorities" even in the 21st century. The rise of Aberrant powers diverted psi research when ultimately inconclusive attempts were made to quantify the effects of the Mazarin-Rashoud node. At most, the scientists of the time concluded that Aberrant powers interacted somehow with strong and weak nuclear forces.

In 2106, humanity finally confirmed the existence of psionic capabilities. The leaders, or proxies as they prefer to be called, of secret orders of psi-active individuals addressed a stunned populace in the aftermath of the historic Sydney spaceport raid. The proxies elaborated on the displays of power that their followers had already made, and promised the world that the orders were committed to defending humanity against all Aberrants.

Though the Trinity knows the proxies and their followers had acted secretly since 2103, we cannot confirm why they withheld knowledge of their existence until the now-historic raid. After a closed UN address, these "Gifted" integrated themselves seamlessly into human society. The Æon Trinity's assistance was key to this acclimation, but we cannot take full credit for the sheer speed and degree to which the psions became a part of everyday life.

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

[ORGOTEK] PROXY ALEX CASSEL, PRIVATE ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS COUNCIL

— Excerpt: textfile, 9.21.2106

We're not Aberrants. We're not a bunch of power-mad freaks hell-bent on world domination. We're human, just like you. We've been given a wonderful gift, though — a new way of being human, if you will.

Our benefactors have done nothing less than unlock a potential that's been buried deep in the human psyche for millennia — and for that, humanity should be eternally grateful. We've finally revealed the secrets of psionic powers, and we're here to share that knowledge with mankind. This isn't some bizarre mutation like the Aberrants had. These abilities are a natural result of human evolution.

Whoa! Hang on! I understand that, despite the Sydney vidcasts shown just a few hours ago, this may be hard to believe. That's why we're here, ladies and gentlemen. We're here to prove what we can do, and that we're on your side. Look, let's try a little demonstration. You'll get a kick out of this. I know I do.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PSI

A psion may achieve harmony with the implicate order through training, meditation and by opening himself to the sublime power that exists throughout the universe. He senses the ebb and flow of energy through all things, and his own metaphysical place in the universe.

Psi connects everything, and no action occurs entirely independent of other forces. Just as gravity exercises a pull, however infinitesimal, on all objects in the universe, so too does psi have a pervasive effect. The Gifted who grasp how the subquantum universe operates understand that all actions have innumerable reactions. An individual's seemingly inconsequential behavior can have tremendous impact on the universe as a whole.

Understanding the connections between all things and the limitless ramifications to all actions is humbling. Indeed, some psions who have had such insights into the cosmos have left their orders abruptly and forsaken their powers altogether. Others have suffered mental illnesses, from mild cases of agoraphobia to severe cases of paranoia. Some Gifted have even suffered physical harm from sudden changes in the subquantum stratum. Vitakinetics and noeticists are called upon with increasing frequency to combat conditions that can result when psions open themselves to the entirety of the universe.

The stresses of psionic attunement and the development of mental ailments, such as psionic psychosis (also called burnout), that result from psi powers have moved a small but vocal portion of the noetic community to urge caution in the creation of new psions. Scientists speculate that humanity might have stumbled across psi powers before it was prepared to control them, and that using psionics could cause far more harm than good.

To allay such fears, most orders allow the Æon Trinity to conduct psychological tests on latent and existing psions. It is hoped that such procedures will isolate potentially unstable Gifted so that they may be treated before they harm themselves or others.

USING PSI

Psionic manipulation is equal parts instinct and training. New psions are taught certain standard effects, but having an innate feel for how to direct psi flow is vital to achieving the results desired.

Each psion describes attunement to the subquantum universe differently. Some relate it to sensing a body part; you don't have to see your leg to know it's there. Others equate it to trying to remember a word that's on the tip of your tongue. You know it's there, you just have to concentrate to conjure it up. Yet others describe their psi attunement as feeling utterly sure of something, a confidence that words cannot express.

Understanding Psi's True Nature

— Clairsentient Proxy Otha Herzog, Guest Address, the first Noetic Conference, Olympus, 10.9.2109

You look for a greater comprehension of the energy we know as psi, and of your place within it. Perhaps I can help you understand.

Think of us all as eddies in a river. Those without the gift of psi cannot see this river. To them, it is as nothing. They focus on the pebbles at the river's bottom, at the fish swimming against the invisible current, at the debris carried on the surface. Those things are reality to these people.

Those of us fortunate enough to emerge whole from the Prometheus chamber know that, while the pebbles, fish and debris are reality, they are sustained and unified by the water that surrounds them. As they are to the river, we are to the implicate order of energy. We Gifted see the water flowing at the same time that we are in the flow. Although we see ripples and whirlpools, and each is distinct and unique, they — and we — are all still part of the river.

However, there is a second concept that is equally important: Psi is not a gentle, contemplative state of being. It is a potent natural force, as subtle as gravity, as powerful as nuclear energy. A river may carry you calmly and serenely, then without warning plunge you into dangerous rapids and thundering falls. So it is with psi.

Psionic energy is not a tool to be used or a device to be manipulated. It is a force of nature that defies our control. We merely tap into it, drawing power from it when it will allow. Nature suffers us to exist. Nature could destroy us utterly if it wanted to. We must be careful not to overstep our bounds.

The Gifted feel everything around them. Psions sense the resonance of all the people and objects they encounter. That energy isn't tangible, but it is there nonetheless. Using psi involves focusing on that resonance; the psion connects to the energy flow in and around others. He doesn't control this force as much as he allows it to permeate him, and his will channels it to affect the universe.

Mial Közs, ISRA member, on channeling psi energy
"It's better than sex! Well, just as good."

NOETIC SCIENCE

Prior to the psions' emergence, a small but dedicated group of scientists was already investigating psi potential. Such research, then known as "psychotronics," bore a distinct stigma. The established scientific community's reluctance to embrace new methods and theories relegated psychotronics to the status of science's whipping boy.

Once psi was an indisputable, proven quantity, scientists were forced to change perspective. The result was the development of noetics, or the science of the psionic mind. This "new" scientific field was founded on equal parts quantum physics, spiritualism and psychotronics (although students of psychotronics claim *it* as the father of noetic science.)

Noetic study proved that psionic powers do not function exclusive of the laws of physics and nature. They simply operate on a level of which no one had previously been aware. Once their eyes were opened, so to speak, noeticists began looking for and finding correlations between quantum physics, genetic biology and psionic powers. The past decade has seen a redefinition of fundamental theories, and progress toward confirmation of a grand unified theory of forces.

Awareness of psi inevitably led to the discovery of an entire subquantum realm of corresponding fundamental particles, dubbed "psions." Joining photons, gravitons, leptons and quarks, these psions proved to be the missing pieces of an elegant foundation for the universe. With the establishment of psi as a new, fifth force, gravity, electromagnetism and weak and strong nuclear forces formed a convincing model for the hypothetical Grand Unification Theory. Since its initial proposal 10 years ago, the theory of psionics has proved to be the key to understanding the universe and our place in it.

With theoretical research comes applied investigation and experimentation. Noeticists have confirmed that the latent capacity to manifest psi abilities can be sensed through use of certain psi powers, or by using biotechnological survey equipment. Indeed, beyond simply detecting psi potential, scans applied to a latent can sometimes discern the psi aptitude to which the subject is best suited. However, the specific genetic differences that separate latents from neutrals still escape noeticists' recognition and understanding.

Noetics also faces the challenge of understanding the biotech devices that psions use. "Bioware" is fascinating not only for its capacity to augment or duplicate psionic abilities, but for its apparent origin as knowledge gifted to humanity by our benefactors. As hard technology is based on physics, biotechnology is rooted in noetics.

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: "psion"
From: Dr. Elena Subashi, PhD
To: Dr. Cecil Walker, PhD
Encryption: SPE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 14:32:12 9.4.2107

Perhaps the most irritating thing about all this is that we coined the term "psion" to refer to "psi energy quanta." Leave it to the byte-hungry media to bastardize it into a term for individuals with psi capability. Well, I'll be damned if we're going to change the scientific term simply to avoid confusion among the unwashed masses.

Bhurano's Theory

— Quantakinetic Proxy S. K. Bhurano, Introductory Address at the first Noetic Conference, Olympus, 10.8.2109

If we look back on the early 20th century, we see that most scientists thought that the great discoveries in physics had already been made. Some questions still needed to be answered, but the fundamental physical laws of our universe were considered "determined." Of course, we know this was wrong. As the tools of scientific inquiry became more precise and opened up new realms of investigation or offered new insights into established beliefs, scientists realized how little they really understood about nature.

The same can be said for us, 200 years later. We have learned to communicate across the globe, we have conquered diseases, we have created weapons capable of massive destruction and we have even walked among the stars. We are proud of our "understanding" of the universe, and our accomplishments are considered evidence of our knowledge. But we are as deluded as the arrogant 20th-century scientist, for all of our accomplishments mean nothing when new discoveries undermine everything we hold to be true. The discovery of psionic energy is just such a revelation.

Psi is not a "new" force. Just as electricity, magnetism, gravity and the forces between atoms have always affected the universe, so too has psi. Until the emergence of the psions, however, we simply didn't have the tools to perceive and manipulate psionic energy.

Hypothesis and experimentation have always been the bases of scientific inquiry. With them, Newton established the laws of motion and gravitation. Maxwell unified electricity with four fundamental equations. Einstein set forth light's constancy and objects' relative motions with the theory of relativity. And now I propose the parameters by which psi functions.

As science progresses, it becomes ever more challenging to quantify new theories. To do so, we must create the tools by which to test them. It was much easier to prove theories about gravity than it was to verify that particles smaller than atoms exist. Whereas Newton proved his theories by dropping objects, subatomic particles were proved to exist with the invention of accelerators and electron microscopes.

The subquantum universe — "psion particles," as the quanta are known — exists all around us, as do protons and quarks. It's always been here, just as molecules and gravity have always been. However, we weren't able to study and quantify this realm until now. With the proper tools at our disposal — nothing less than psi abilities themselves — we can finally explore this last, unifying force of nature.

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Biotechnological development is a product of the rise of psionic powers among humanity. The concepts behind the technology derive from the psionic ability to recognize and manipulate the subquantum energy flowing through all living things. By directing these energies, psions can transform living matter into technological tools. Gifted from the Norça and Orgotek, in particular, can use their psionic capabilities to modify and control biotech to a degree even other psions envy.

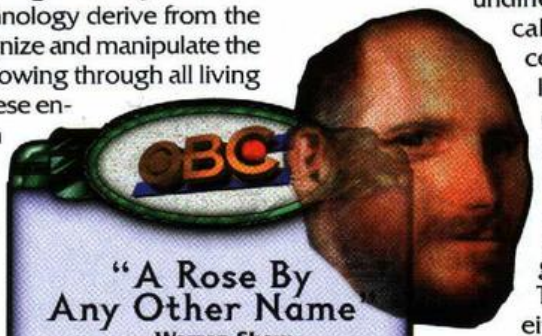
Such devices can be used unto themselves, but they are often combined with conventional hardtech. However, biotech use is limited mostly to psions; the capability to use biotechnology beyond basic devices requires psi energy that only the Gifted possess and can control. Operating even basic bioware applications can exhaust the mind of a normal human. Trying to use advanced bioware has been known to drive normals insane or even kill them. Noeticists are researching biotechnology intensively in hopes of making all bioware available to everyone.

A BIOTECH PRIMER

Bioware (of which individual devices are also known as "bioapps," or biological appliances) originates from enormous cultures of undifferentiated living cells, called matrices. Matrix cells are processed by large organic computers (referred to, simply enough, as "matrix computers"), which stimulate the cells to grow along a programmed template. This growth results in either a living structure that continues to grow and renew itself, or in a quasi-living structure that maintains some functions of life, but is really little more than a shape composed of living matter. The important distinction here, of course, is that bioware is a product of life, as opposed to hardtech, which is a product of mechanical processes.

As with all appliances, weapons, vehicles and other mechanical creations, maintenance and upkeep are paramount to bioapps' continued function. Unlike hardtech, however, bioapps can require some unusual if not downright bizarre methods of maintenance. The simplest bioapp may require nothing more than occasional cleaning, while intricate devices may require the removal of excess cells, oiling to maintain surface cells, comfortable bedding or periodic immersions in nutrient baths — "feeding," as it were.

Living, self-renewing bioapps used in toxic or highly radioactive environments (unprotected space, the colonies, or Bahrain) must be scanned regularly, either by a competent noetic technician or by



"A Rose By Any Other Name"

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective* © 2110 OBC

With the quantification of psi, it became possible to create a scientific classification for individuals possessed of the ability to utilize psi energies. Noetic science labeled them *Homo sapiens mentis*, beings still indisputably human, but possessed of a slightly different genetic makeup than the rest of us.

Of course, human vernacular has relegated *"mentis"* to scientific papers. Other labels, from the prosaic "Gifted" to the derogatory "psyq," are used. In the end, most people seem comfortable with "psion," despite its intended use as a term for elements of psi energy, not psi users.

Likewise, terminology used to refer to those without psi abilities ranges from uninspired to rude. "Neutral" is currently in vogue, although psions have been known to call the rest of us "neuts," "norms," "blanks," "empties" and other names inappropriate to this broadcast. It's unfortunate that mankind feels it necessary to create such artificial labels, for in the end, aren't we all human?

Macrotech versus Microtech

— Dr. Kieran Baxter, *The Technological Age*
© 2110 Walkabout Press

Psions have developed only a few means by which to turn organic materials into technology. The result is basic templates used for bioware development. There are four known cellular matrices: bacterial, plasmal, floral and faunal. Most bioapps are created using floral and faunal matrices, as these are the best understood by noetic scientists. Early experiments with bacterial and plasmal matrices have been frozen for future study.

Most available bioapps can be considered "macrotech." They are large, obvious objects, like guns, powered armor, vehicles or medical scanners. In general, such macrotech is non- or minimally invasive to the user's body. Macrotech is relatively easy to create and maintain.

Also contained within matrix computers' organic memory banks are templates for bacterial and plasmal "microtech." Such devices are microscopic organisms — biological nanotech, if you will — that form a thin layer over the skin to enhance an electrokinetic's emissions, that perform microsurgery under a vitakinetic's guidance, or that assist in a biokinetic's alteration of cellular structure.

Microtech research is hindered by concerns about the very nature of the technology. Devices of this sort generally require invasive applications, and can give rise to unforeseen side effects and problems. And once they're introduced, how can they be removed?

bioware designed for such maintenance. Cellular mutations may develop that interfere with the devices' functions. In fact, it's not unusual for bioapps to develop forms of cancer after exposure to a hostile environment. If such afflictions are detected early, the mutations are generally easy to excise or repair.

FORMATTING BIOWARE

Each piece of bioware possesses its own psionic field. The bioapp resonates with a low-level psi aura related to its component materials. A psion manipulates this field to activate a device. Bioapps with weak fields can be used by normal people, as everyone resonates with at least some degree of psionic energy, even if it's not enough to possess telekinesis or to read minds.

Bioapps are one of two types: formatted or unformatted. Unformatted bioapps perform only limited functions. Normal people can use these devices without suffering mental burnout.

Formatting a bioapp is usually accomplished by injecting a small amount of a psion's genetic coding into the device. Various enzymes contained in the central matrix break down the gene, absorbing the DNA groups that are instrumental to psi activity. Those groups are then integrated into the bioware's own DNA, which alters the device's psionic field to resonate in sequence with the psion's own emissions. This synergy creates a link between the psion and the bioapp, allowing him to operate it. Some devices can be formatted to be used by multiple psions; each person simply introduces a DNA sample.

THE PSI ORDERS

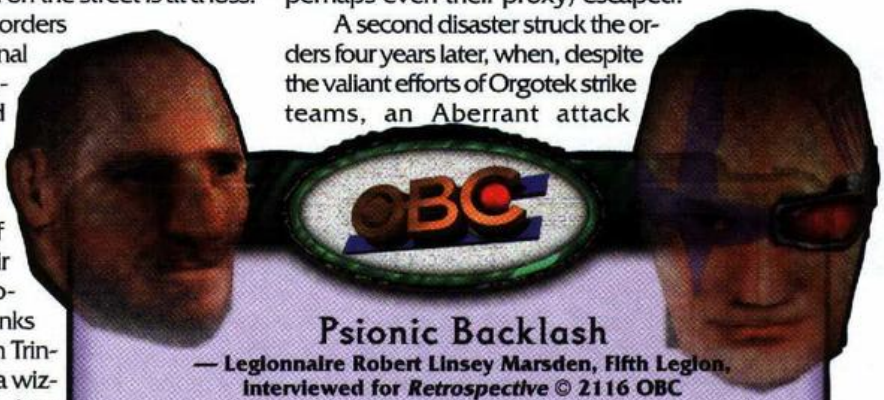
Everyone knows what the psi orders are — but ask for a detailed explanation of them and odds are you'll get a blank stare and a mumbled, "Well, they're the *orders*." At best, Joe Hologram — the average individual — can state accurately that each order represents a particular psi aptitude or path of psionic development (although he wouldn't use those words). Beyond that, the person on the street is at a loss.

In other words, the orders have done an exceptional job of integrating themselves into the social and political landscape. Their existence is accepted without question by the majority of normal humans, and their activities are mythologized or rationalized thanks to the efforts of the Æon Trinity and an army of media wizards. Questioning the motives and actions of the orders is like questioning whether you really need oxygen. Both are considered essential for humanity's survival.

When the orders made their first public appearance 14 years ago (after operating in secret for years previously), there were eight of them: the vitakinetic Æsculapian Order, the quantakinetic Chitra Bhanu, the clairsentient ISRAns, the psychokinetic Legionnaires, the telepathic Ministry, the biokinetic Norça, the electrokinetic Orgotek Order and the teleporting Upeo wa Macho. Tragedy has whittled their ranks, however; one order has been exterminated and another has vanished.

In 2109, the proxies stunned the psion community with the revelation that the quantakinetic Chitra Bhanu Order was in league with the resurgent Aberrants. The other seven orders united to exterminate their traitorous brethren. The operation was completed by the spring of 2110, yet rumors persist to present day that more than a few Chitra Bhanu (and perhaps even their proxy) escaped.

A second disaster struck the orders four years later, when, despite the valiant efforts of Orgotek strike teams, an Aberrant attack



Psionic Backlash

— Legionnaire Robert Linsey Marsden, Fifth Legion, interviewed for *Retrospective* © 2116 OBC

Psi energy is usually only a tickle in your mind, 'cept it's not really your mind, if you get me. It's something more than that. Your mind and body all in one. If somebody dies nearby or an explosion goes off, you feel it like a smack to the back of your head. Nothing to get twisted about, usually, but sometimes backlash can give you a nasty headache. Most times it's over in a flash — an instant of hell.

When something really rears up — the natural way of things gets fucked royally — you don't feel a tickle, you feel a knife stabbing straight through you. The day France was destroyed, the backlash was about as far from a headache as a solar flare is from a match.

I was in BT — sorry, basic training — outside Perth when the shit hit the rotor. From what — 30,000 kilometers away? — I felt it. It was like my entire body was a single giant nerve ending being stomped on. The pain only lasted for a few seconds, but it felt like forever. Afterward, I had the worst hangover of my life — without even the pleasure of having a single drop.

Know what the kicker was? I was just some newbie grunt. I'd barely started to understand the — what do ya call it? — "subquantum energy." Our drill sergeant, an old Zen master, was laid out by the *Esperanza* backlash. He was unconscious for two whole days, and that was just the start of his problems.

They say the better you get with psi, the more susceptible you are to that sort of thing. Sure as hell hope I never get as good as Sergeant Tobashi. He still can't move the right side of his body.

ESPERANZA CRASH >>>ORGOTEK ARCHIVE

brought the *Esperanza* orbital station crashing to Earth in the heart of Europe. Every Gifted (and a number of latents) felt the tremendous psionic shock wave that resulted from the impact and the millions of deaths that it caused. A backlash caused by the teleporters' mass disappearance thundered through the subquantum stratum an instant later. Many highly attuned psions still suffer psionic trauma resulting from those combined events, even today.

It's commonly accepted that the *Esperanza's* destruction (and that of a good deal of France) was merely a decoy that allowed the Aberrants time to strike at their real targets: the Upeo. Regardless of speculation, the fact remains that the teleporters are gone, and their absence has crippled extrasolar expansion for half a decade.

Strangely, when both orders vanished, so too did anyone with strong latency in either quantakinetics or teleportation. Whether such latents disappeared as well, continue to be eradicated as they are found, or are triggered to one of the remaining six aptitudes is unknown.

The Chitra Bhanu tragedy and the Upeo's vanishing act have also injured the psi orders' public image. Despite the Æon Trinity's best efforts at mediation and spin control, various governments and even some psions look with increasing frequency at the orders' failures and setbacks. They seem to lose sight of how crucial the Gifted are to the future of humanity.

FUNCTION

Each order was established and is still administered (or ruled, some say) by a single proxy — a psion with abilities far beyond those of even the most accomplished of his or her kind. Theories from reasonable to ridiculous abound regarding the powers of the proxies. The paranoid and conspiracy theorists claim that after the proxies underwent their own transformations, they diluted the processes used on their followers to ensure their own supremacy. Of course, it's just as plausible that

the proxies are simply the most powerful psionic individuals the world has ever known.

Whatever the truth behind the proxies' powers, they lead their respective orders with varying degrees of control, and seem to be united in their dedication to drive off the Aberrants.

The orders themselves are socio-political organizations, and have autonomy over the creation, training and deployment of psions. Each order is responsible for locating humans with appropriate latent talents and convincing those humans to undergo the conversion process, known as the Prometheus Effect. This isn't usually a hard sell, as the media has done an exceptional job portraying psions as something that *everyone* should want to be. Psionic powers, wealth and the chance to save the universe — literally. Who *wouldn't* want to be one of the Gifted?

Methods used to seek out latents vary with the order, but typically involve search teams and testing centers. The majority of humanity has the same basic degree of resonance that flows through everything in the universe. Those with a stronger amount of psi who test as viable latents don't register an inclination for a certain aptitude; they simply show the potential to channel psi energy. A latent who exhibits a noticeable tendency for a specific psi aptitude is sought after greatly by the orders, since such an individual often makes a powerful psion in that aptitude. In the end, though, the order that takes the latent in and puts him through its Prometheus Effect dictates the aptitude that the person actually manifests.

Acceptance into an order also varies, often requiring more than just possessing psi latency. Some pose rigorous entrance tests, some refuse to promote latents of certain backgrounds (whether cultural, religious or racial), while others welcome potential psions of any temperament or background.

The Neptune Division of the Æon Trinity also facilitates trade and transfer of latents among the orders, although the Ministry and the Norça have not or do not participate in this program. The Ministry has only recently offered to exchange latents with aptitudes other than telepathy. The biokinetic Norça continue their solitary and secretive recruitment, exclusive of the other orders.

The orders transform latents into psions in a similar way, although enough differences exist in the processes to create psions with unique psionic capabilities. A latent is enclosed in a "conversion tank," referred to as a Prometheus chamber. Supposedly, he can be triggered only in one of these special bioware tanks, regardless of the aptitude to which he is inclined. Each order has its own chambers (which are kept in individual, secured locations). The aptitudes reportedly manipulate psi energy in their own way, and the various orders' chambers perform slightly different functions to trigger the appropriate powers. Someday humans may manifest active psi powers spontaneously, but until that time the Prometheus chambers are key to the birth of psions.

Psions created by these means are supposed to be capable of only certain psionic effects. Research conducted since the emergence of psionic powers indicates that psions may sometimes manifest rudimentary levels of aptitudes other than the ones in which they're triggered. Most noeticists and high-ranking psions state that, while primitive expressions of multiple aptitudes are possible, humans simply aren't mentally equipped to manifest multiple aptitudes fully. Further study is required to learn more of the potential inherent in this mystery.

After their conversion, fledgling psions are trained and subsequently deployed by the orders that triggered them. This education and assignment, while primarily concerned with combating Aberrants and hostile aliens, includes other endeavors unrelated to the orders' primary function. For instance, while electrokinetics join the other orders in hunting down Aberrants, their order, Orgotek, also pursues a thriving business in bioware development, shipbuilding and terraforming. Even the orders, it seems, aren't above making a profit.

A number of normal humans assist in the orders' "mundane" pursuits. Though comprising a significant percentage of their respective orders and growing in number, the Gifted still make up a relatively small portion of the human population. Normals who work for the orders are essentially employees, and are not part of the orders in the truest

The Prometheus Effect: An Analytical Presentation

— Excerpt: The third Noetic Conference, Olympus, 10.6.2111

The Prometheus Effect, labeled such by the Vitakinetic Proxy Dr. Matthieu Zweidler, largely remains a mystery even to most psions. The actual mechanics of the process involve the latent imbibing biofluid, then being immersed in a gel-filled bioware tank. The subject falls into a fugue state while her body is infused with nano-organisms. A psion monitors the subject through a biolink, and follows a very precise process to trigger the latent to a full psion.

In the orders' early days, proxies were personally involved in each latent's awakening. Since then, it seems most have passed on the responsibility to a few key Gifted underlings. From what we are told, only del Fuego, the Norça Proxy, still monitors his psions' transformations personally.

New psions describe their emergence from the fugue state, as their bodies rise dripping from the tanks, as being reborn. Powers are typically uncontrollable but weak for the first few days after being "triggered." Control and strength derive from familiarity with and training in the psions' new abilities.

sense. Only psions are embraced as true order members.

Almost all psions, even those who work for the Æon Trinity in some capacity, remain members of the orders that created them. After all, the benefits are good, the company is amenable and backup is usually available when Aberrants strike. However, individual psions have been known to forge out on their own. Each order has its own policy on rogue agents, from the Norça's sometimes extreme measures in recovering free agents to the Legion's public commendation of individuality. It's most common for psions to switch order allegiances for personal — or financial — reasons. The Æon Trinity has taken a direct hand in brokering these personnel exchanges, which seems to have eased relations between the orders in general.

Finally, while each order has a central base of operations where its influence is most apparent, they all maintain global — and interplanetary — operations, as well. The Æsculapian Order, for example, is based near Basel, Switzerland, but has a second-

"PROMETHEUS UNBOUND" >>> DAVE.A.I. >>> COLLECTION OF DR. MATTHIEU ZWEIDLER

ary center of operations in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and numerous clinics in over 40 countries, on Luna, and on most human colonies.

PSI ORDERS AND THE ÆON TRINITY

Æon has helped the psi orders grow since their very inception. The Trinity has offered assistance and guidance to the proxies over the past two decades, and extends that same aid to the psions of each order. While the majority of psions do not perform missions for Æon directly, virtually all interact with the society on some level.

Psions become associated with Æon through a number of means. Although the orders understand that working together is important, they all have a tendency to perform independently of the others, and each considers its policies to be the best. Who can say what the result of the *Esperanza* attack would have been had the orders been able to mount a unified defense?

Æon's most important function is coordinating the orders. The Trinity organizes most missions involving psions from multiple orders. Those Gifted who seem to work especially well together are usually offered extended assignments. As long as the orders approve of such cooperative programs, the Trinity provides the majority of each psion's wages and benefits.

Solitary psions may find their way to Æon as well, either through freelance work or as parts of Triton Division's investigations. These individual Gifted are offered positions in teams of like-minded psions. Even those free agents inclined to work with normals or to work solo are accommodated when it's feasible.

A fringe benefit that results from working with the Trinity is a sense of normalcy for the anything-but-normal psions. Æon is one of the few institutions that brings together not only psions of various orders, but also humans of all backgrounds. Many Gifted feel uncomfortable around neutrals, and while most orders strive to alleviate this separation anxiety, only Æon can provide psions with a truly cosmopolitan environment in which to work and live.

THE ÆSCULAPIAN ORDER

a.k.a. vitakinetics, docs or rexs

— textfile conversion, Hiroko Foster, EMT, Æsculapian Order

Humanity has always suspected that the mind is a powerful force for healing, but hard evidence has eluded those who have sought it. Almost 15 years ago, the proxies gave us proof enough for even the most hardened skeptic. We psions of the Æsculapian Order use the power of the mind to cure illnesses, to mend broken bones and to perform medical wonders that were previously believed the province of wizards, saints and miracle-workers.

Yet despite our amazing skills, Æsculapians are about as far removed from metaphysical mumbo jumbo as one can get. In fact, the docs I've worked with tend to view their own abilities and potential with a coldly scientific eye. Point out to a vitakinetic the similarity between her techniques and the medieval "laying of hands" and you're likely to get a half-hour lecture about the perils of confusing religious quackery with the hard science of vitakinesis. Or you just might get a half-hour rant about how you're exactly right.

ORGANIZATION AND HISTORY

Dr. Matthieu Zweidler, MD, fathered the Æsculapian Order. One of the world's finest neurosurgeons, Zweidler was the head of the Montressor Clinic, an elite private hospital located in a converted monastery outside of Basel, Switzerland.

After he was transformed into one of the original eight proxies, Zweidler used both his clinic and a network of affiliated hospitals, former employees and contacts to lay the groundwork for what would become the Æsculapian Order. Within a few months, Zweidler began a quiet process of identification, recruitment and triggering of vitakinetic psions.

Thanks to Zweidler's carefully laid plans, when the proxies revealed themselves to the world, the docs were already up and running. Those first-generation vitakinetics disguised their powers for at least three years

· CONFIDENTIAL ·

VITAKINESIS

This aptitude covers the use of psionic energy to heal the body and mind — or to harm them. The majority of development in vitakinesis involves its healing applications, as categorized under the iatrosis and mentatis modes. Training in algesis, the application of vitakinesis to cause harm, is controlled rigidly by high-ranking Æsculapians.

Iatrosis: The psion applies his will to mend physical injuries, from minor cuts and scrapes to massive trauma and loss of limbs.

Mentatis: The use of psi energy to remedy psychological derangements, healing the mind rather than the body.

Algesis: This mode is geared toward causing injury. It is considered a necessary evil in the battle against Aberrants, but few vitakinetics practice its effects.

ÆON TRINITY MISSION PARAMETERS

As a vitakinetic, you heal body and mind. You mend and even regenerate damaged tissue or soothe psychological trauma, all by focusing your will on a subject. While your powers could be used to harm instead of heal, such actions run entirely contrary to what we ask of you.

Your aptitude sees primary use in field work. You engage in research and missions to contain subjects with genetic anomalies. You assist in the eradication of Aberrants themselves. You enter into front-line combat and tend to your team members' wounds with both your medical training and your psi powers.

Your powers are essential to more than simply maintaining your teammates' health, though. You are the team's lifeline.

and were established physicians, known and accepted by the normal doctors and nurses whom they worked with. The first docs built a reputation as selfless, fearless angels of mercy.

Today, vitakinetic clinics are located everywhere from Earth to the extrasolar colonies. The media is full of stories of heroic rexs who brave the dangers of catastrophes, epidemics and battlefields to treat the sick and injured. Indeed, as the order expands it absorbs, duplicates or simply makes obsolete many existing medical-relief organizations. Even the venerable International Red Cross has been virtually subsumed by Æsculapians. It only makes sense, though; we are simply better equipped to handle emergencies. At least, that's what our press releases say.

ZWEIDLER PORTRAIT > MONTRESSOR CLINIC

Latents with the potential for the vitakinesis aptitude are relatively common, but Zweidler is particular about the people whom he allows to undergo the Prometheus Effect; simply registering latency isn't enough. Still, there have been quite a few docs over the years. I've heard the Æsculapian is the third largest order after the Legions and Orgotek. There may be as many as 10,000 vitakinetics running around.

GEOGRAPHY

"Seasoned with Basel" has become slang among the docs' field ops for describing idiotic policies that come straight from the top. The Basel operation is dominated by Dr. Zweidler and his peers from the pre-proxy days, but field healers now come increasingly from non-Western backgrounds.

Zweidler insists on strict documentation of all manifestations and uses of vitakinesis. The strongest adherents to the order's cult of scientific rationality are based in Basel. The clinic is the docs' administrative center, training facility and noetic research lab. The Montressor Clinic also maintains a massive organ bank, with satellite facilities at other major clinics. The banks' director, Roland Stoltzfus, claims that his people can rush an organ to anywhere in-system in less than 24 hours.

Much of the order's power is concentrated in Basel. That's why the clinic is guarded heavily by both psions and armed human agents. Ironically, these security forces seem to spend much of their time controlling the hordes of sick and infirm who drag themselves to Zweidler's doorstep in search of cures.

Beyond the order's hundreds of small clinics, posts and managed-care facilities, there are major Æsculapian clinics in Olympus, Minnesota, Addis Ababa and Haiti. The Haitian city of Port-au-Prince is home to the "loyal opposition" to Zweidler's technocratic cadre. Shamen, faith healers, acupuncturists — docs with different ways of perceiving vitakinesis — congregate there, an ocean and a world view away from the order's often stifling administrators.

What's in a Name?

— Corl Heisler, *The Painful Truth* © 2119 MMI

Apparently Zweidler was a fan of the Classics. He dubbed his nascent order the "Æsculapians" after Æsculapius, a Roman physician and son of Jupiter who was supposedly skilled enough to bring the dead back to life.

Zweidler must never have looked up the details of Æsculapius' *whole* story; Jupiter was none-too-pleased with his son's activities and killed him with a thunderbolt from the heavens.

I don't have to tell you that "Æsculapian" is a mouthful. It's not surprising that nobody uses it (except Zweidler, of course). Everyone calls them "vitakinetics," instead, after their aptitude. And if that doesn't thrill you, there's always slang. The Æsculapians are essentially glorified doctors, right? Just a short hop from that to "docs." And pop culture and we megameds being what we are, had to be clever and bastardize the traditional "Rx" into "rex."

So the order's official paperwork refers to "Æsculapians," but ask anybody on the street who that refers to. As far as Joe Hologram is concerned, it's "vitakinetic," "doc" or "rex."

I don't know why Zweidler gets so upset about all this. We still humor him with "Prometheus Effect," don't we? You ask me, there's

While Zweidler's deeply rational soul loathes these docs' spiritual views, he still recruits powerful latents on principle, regardless of their beliefs. If Zweidler can't work with someone after the transformation, he simply ships her out. Zweidler is quite touchy about how closely his special talent mimics the effects of folklore and legend, and can't bear reminders of that "stigma."

Æsculapian clinics follow one of the two established paradigms of Switzerland or Haiti, depending on where a clinic director did her internship. There's a friendly — and sometimes not-so-friendly — rivalry as to which group is "right." A doc can still move from one clinic to another with a minimum of culture shock, though.

·TRITON ARCHIVE·

— recovered email fragment from Dr. Matthieu Zweidler

[Haitian vitakinetics are] nothing more than a bunch of damned witch doctors using my money and equipment to paint themselves blue and cavort....

TRAINING AND ORGANIZATION

Each rex performs an internship of three to five years at one of the main clinics after being triggered. Upon graduation, the psion is considered a licensed medical technician. Membership in the order after this point isn't mandatory, but is expected, and the benefits that Zweidler provides are so attractive that almost no one ever leaves.

Æsculapian clinics, no matter their locale or setup, follow a Basel organizational model; the paperwork and chain of command are the same in every clinic from Europe to Europa. The chief of staff (essentially, the ranking psion) manages the clinic, while neuts fill key administrative roles. The smallest clinics may have only a single rex, while the largest maintain as many as 100 fully trained docs at any time.

No matter their size, most of our clinics also have full medical staffs of neutral doctors, nurses and technicians who outnumber the psions whom they work with. The latter are the "superstars," though, and I've known a few who have vid-star attitudes, but no one can argue with their results. Psions fresh out of internships are attached to existing clinics, unless specially directed to research programs or the military. Only the largest clinics have the facilities to maintain more than a couple of trainees at a time.

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ÆSCULAPIANS: INTERACTION WITH OTHER ORDERS

Æsculapians maintain cordial relations with Orgotek. The two study and develop bioware together (although despite strong professional ties, no love is lost between the two orders' proxies). The Legions are likewise looked upon favorably, since psychokinetics and vitakinetics support one another in combat. A number of docs have ventured to South America for extended research with the Norça. The purpose of such study is unknown by low-ranking docs. While Æsculapians consult occasionally with Ministry psions on psi-related psychological problems, the two orders otherwise make a point to avoid each other. ISRA psions are given little more than a nod and a smirk by docs, since clairsentient powers are considered to have little use beyond patrolling for Aberrants.

Of all the orders, the Æsculapians seem to have the most trouble with their own. The Basel adherents' rigid scientific mentality is increasingly at odds with the Haitian docs' "spiritual" attitude. This could become a concern if the psions allow their philosophical differences to affect their work.

INTERPLANETARY SCHOOL FOR RESEARCH AND ADVANCEMENT (ISRA)

a.k.a. clairsentients, seers, clears or eyes

— textfile conversion, Otha Herzog, Clairsentient Proxy

I am given to understand that you wish to know about ISRA. Much of what you would like to learn is impossible to comprehend if you are not clairsentient, but I will relate my knowledge as clearly as I may.

· CONFIDENTIAL ·

CLAIRSENTIENCE

A Gifted with this aptitude can extend his senses far beyond the human norm, can read the "auras" of people and objects to learn their histories, and can even catch glimpses of the future. Clairsentience effects are categorized under the psychometry, psychonavigation and telesthesia modes.

Psychometry: These powers involve attuning to a subject's aura, as the clairsentients call it, to learn of recent events and encounters.

Psychonavigation: This mode enables the psion to find a subject by keying into its subquantum resonance.

Telesthesia: The Gifted can project his senses through physical barriers and across vast distances by attuning himself to psionic energy wave-forms.

ÆON TRINITY MISSION PARAMETERS

As a clairsentient you perceive the universe with senses far greater and sharper than normal. You can see through walls and into the deepest reaches of space. Your comprehension of the physical world is unparalleled.

You are our scouts and detectives. You pilot orbital craft and our incredible new jump ships. You scan the stars for signs of hostile incursions of all types, from Aberrants to aliens to even human forces. You investigate disaster sites, crimes and mysteries, uncovering information with your powers of perception.

You are our eyes, peering into the darkness to bring the truth to light.

We clairsentients do not search for glory or power. We are servants of a greater power, of the energy that surrounds us all. We are your eyes, always watching, ever aware of the forces at work in the universe. It is not ISRA's function to control these forces. Instead, we alert our Gifted brethren, and gather when those forces conspire to disrupt the living harmony of all things.

Aberrants are the great discordant note in this reality, and we direct ourselves most intently against them. Clairsentient psions are vigilant for the telltale disruptions that signify Aberrant energies at work, and are quick to call for aid to combat these monstrosities.

But do not assume that is all ISRA does. We aid humanity in whatever fashion we may. For some, this means venturing into space aboard marvelous craft, exploring the stars for new resources and places of habitation. Others investigate mysteries that plague our world, from delving into historical analysis to rooting out sad, twisted souls who commit crimes and evade punishment. There are also those of us who plumb the enigmas of psi itself, hoping that with greater understanding we will have greater capacity to use our tremendous abilities.

You know me as a proxy, the leader of the clairsentient psions. I must correct you in this. I merely guide my siblings, giving them the wisdom of my experience when appropriate, much as I do with you now. Psions must follow individual paths. I simply hope my words are beneficial when my fellows take their steps.

LIVING LETTERS OF THE HOLOGRAPHIC TEXT

I have styled ISRA after the simple, elegant models of monastic orders, although our structure is still quite informal. All funds and property of the school — meeting areas, vehicles, equipment and the small number of orbital stations we are fortunate enough to have — are communal, shared among all members. Decisions made by our siblings are arrived at democratically, although weight is

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

THE FATHER OF CLAIRSENTIENCE

— Analysis: Malcolm Severn, PhD, Triton Division, 4.24.2117

Otha Herzog, the proxy who refers to himself as "the world's most forgettable man," didn't have access to the political or financial resources that funded the other orders. Instead, he built his order out of a deep reverence for humanity and a dedication to the Baha'i philosophy, which proposes a unification of all faiths and the harmony of all people. His first psions were followers of Baha'i, and numbered in the hundreds when ISRA finally took its place on the world stage in 2106.

Formerly a naturalized citizen of Germany, but now "a citizen of the universe and a servant to no nation," Herzog is believed to live in *Huruf al-Hayy*, an orbital station on the solar system's outer reaches. This choice of headquarters (so far from the center of human activity) appears eccentric until one remembers that distance matters little to the clairsentient proxy.

Herzog considers himself a parent rather than a leader — although his humility goes further; he refers to clairsentient psions as his "siblings." He leaves most administration and the training of new psions to a group collectively known as the Mashriqi. While the Mashriqi have no official school status or clearly defined social privileges, other ISRAns generally respect their opinions. This is a reflection of Herzog's own manner of guidance. He emerges infrequently from *Huruf al-Hayy*, but even his simplest word has great weight among clairsentients (and a growing number of other psions).

given to the wise and experienced among us. In ISRA, everyone has a voice.

Ours is not the largest order, nor is it the smallest. While ISRAns who manifest a low level of clairsentience are fairly numerous, my siblings with piercing insight into the universe number only a few thousand. The demographic figures that we have show ISRA's membership to follow a broad "universal human norm," with members from, and in, all parts of human space.

I am often asked about my politics, and those of my siblings. I feel that such things, much like hairstyles and musical tastes, are personal choices. Politics has no place in ISRA, though I understand governments' perceived necessity in greater society. The school displays favoritism and antagonism toward no nation, corporation or other powerful group.

I am pleased that many of my siblings follow my example and renounce their national citizenship. Artificial bonds of political loyalty and patriotism are not the way of ISRA, for they cloud the purity of the visions we seek. Still, I think no less of those psions who maintain ties to home. They follow their own paths. They may have seen that the courses they must take lead them to serve their countries, or to even join the Æon Trinity.

It saddens me, however, that ISRA's policies have not endeared us to the more authoritarian national governments. I do not understand why clairsentients of Asian extraction cannot renounce their Chinese citizenship. Or why local statutes in some regions of the Federated States of America equate ISRA membership to treason. How is such a thing possible? We are all citizens of humanity. Such boundaries and limitations serve only to separate us from one another.

VISION AND INSIGHT

Although I follow Baha'ism, as do many of my Mashriqi siblings, we do not reference it explicitly in the school's official materials or training literature. ISRA does not make any claims about the truth or relative worth of any religion or philosophical system. Instead, the school practices a policy of enlightened tolerance, encouraging each clairsentient to find her own symbolic framework. Those elements of Baha'i (largely terminology and general ethics) included in ISRAn teachings are secularized completely.

Sadly, the public still seems to believe that ISRA is an official conduit for Baha'ism. This makes it difficult for my siblings to deal with Israel-Judah,

ISRA Methodology and Philosophy

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective*
© 2117 OBC

ISRAns are expected to turn over at least 80% of their earnings for clairsentient work to the school. In return, ISRA ensures that all members have access to lodgings, board and a small living allowance for clothing and personal items. Members aren't required to live simply, but many follow the more experienced clairsentients' example. Each Mashriq literally owns nothing, having renounced personal ownership to live entirely within the communal standards of ISRA.

Material goods aren't an issue in ISRA. Yet, despite the Mashriqi's best efforts, many young or less gifted ISRAns have become obsessed with boosting their power levels, citing a vague feeling that "something big is coming," and that they need to "see more clearly." This desire to increase their abilities causes some psions to rely on and become addicted to psi enhancers and other biotech augmentation devices.

Supposedly, Herzog himself is subject to a sense of foreboding. The growing significance of messianic imagery within the Baha'i religious community and his own order is said to unsettle the proxy. He has withdrawn from the day-to-day running of ISRA, leaving most immediate practical matters in the hands of his Mashriqi. Herzog reportedly spends ever-greater periods of time in deep meditation, which is allegedly accompanied by long periods of fasting and other practices.

given that followers of Baha'i were expelled from their headquarters at Mount Carmel during the Temple Sealing. I have nothing but the greatest friendship for the Israelis. As I have said in the past, I am in debt to Jerusalem for encouraging the Baha'i — and my humble school — to look spaceward.

We ISRAns prefer to be away from the distractions of a gravity well when contemplating complex visions. This should address your curiosity regarding our tendency to work and live in orbital stations and other extraterrestrial locales. Our "isolation" is also due in large part to our involvement in jump-ship development. We are best suited of all the orders to pilot these incredible new vessels into the depths of space. Our past work with the Upeo wa Macho to locate teleportation destinations gave us invaluable training, and an affinity for sensing the depths of space. When the jump ships are fully functional, we shall finally rejoin our star-lost people.

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ISRA: INTERACTION WITH OTHER ORDERS

ISRAns seem to get along well with almost everyone. Clairsentients are the first line of defense against the Aberrants, since they can often detect the spatial disruptions caused by the creatures' powers of "warp travel." Beyond that, the ISRAns don't have an agenda beyond using their abilities to improve the human condition. They don't force their viewpoints on others, and are disposed to lending assistance wherever possible.

However, the same powers that make clairsentients so useful also make them socially shunned. ISRAns have a tendency to show up unannounced, and to deliver cryptic messages about impending events. The fact that they're usually right doesn't alleviate their unsettling manner. Psions of other orders consider clairsentients with cautious optimism. ISRAns are very useful to have around, but whenever they appear, something is bound to happen.

THE LEGIONS

a.k.a. psychokinetics, PKs, Legionnaires or war dogs

— textfile conversion, Robert Linsey Marsden, Æon Trinity, Proteus Division

Considering we psychokinetics tend to be a fiercely independent lot, some wags marvel that enough of us PKs can stick together to make a single legion, let alone an entire order. How we do it isn't such a surprise. Take a bunch of folks with something in common — beating Aberrant arse — and they'll stick together just fine.

Course, things would've fallen apart by now if not for the General — who you'd call our proxy. General Solveig Larssen is a holy terror disguised as a Scandinavian woman in her 50s. She's the shining example of psychokinetic achievement. It boggles the mind to see her in the trenches, using all three PK modes at once while us poor sods are trying to get our brains around one, yeh?

She's the only proxy I know who still goes into the field 'stead of hiding behind a desk. Be sure, the men — oh, and women — in the Legions love her for it. General Larssen isn't just a great soldier, she's one of the most brilliant tacticians that ever lived. Alexander, Attila, Napoleon, Bradley, Osner — and Larssen. If you don't agree, I've got a few thousand friends who beg to differ.

The noeticists say psychokinesis is the most common of all the aptitudes. Looking at the Legions, I'd say they're right. We're a damn big mob! Tens of thousands of screamin' psions getting up close and personal with Aberrants. It's a good thing PK's so common, I suppose, considering our attrition rate.

The General uses our numbers to best advantage by maintaining seven PK groups, each geared to a different kind of Legionnaire. She lets her commanders run their Legions how they will, but makes sure they always remember who calls the shots (and if you have to ask, this interview is over). Sure, we have standard four-year tours, and a lot of Legionnaires muster out at the end of theirs, but General Larssen allows us to hook up with other organizations while we're still with the Legions.

I don't mean buddy up with some upstart country or paranoid metacorp. With a Legion post in almost every nation on Earth and every territory in settled space, we make sure the three Cs are in effect for all our troops — communication, coordination and confidence. Our loyalty is to the Legions before anyone else. That's why "Legions First," yeh?

THE FIRST — THE HOME GUARD

Scattered across the continent of Australia, the Legionnaire Home Guard is characterized by its psions' blue and white uniforms, and is adored by not only Australians, but by humanity in general.

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PSYCHOKINESIS

These powers involve molecular manipulation. A psychokinetic can create cold or heat or can move something by manipulating molecules. The three psychokinesis modes are cryokinesis, pyrokinesis and telekinesis.

Cryokinesis: Cryo effects slow down an object's molecular motion, simply cooling it or perhaps even freezing it solid.

Pyrokinesis: These effects excite molecules to generate heat and to cause combustion.

Telekinesis: The psion lifts objects and even himself by moving an entire molecular construct with focused psi energy.

ÆON TRINITY MISSION PARAMETERS

Psychokinesis involves mind over matter. You create fire, generate ice and can even fly. Your abilities manipulate the subtle potential and raw power inherent to objects and the very air around you.

You defend innocents against Aberrant threats. You patrol cities, colonies and space itself in search of any and all dangers to humanity. You act as police and militia, keeping the peace and confronting menaces.

You are a front-line assault trooper, and you guard terrestrial and stellar borders against threats of any kind.

PROTEUS ARCHIVES

THE SEVEN LEGIONS

— Analysis: Craig Bartholomew, Proteus Division, 5.29.2108

The Legions are a study in contradiction. Of all the orders, theirs is the most regimented, divided as it is into seven units ranging in size from several hundred to several thousand psions. However, while the Legions operate with a strict military structure (supervised and maintained by Proxy Larssen), each Legion has its own system of rank and regulations, and style of command. This includes everything from a Legion's philosophy to means of financing endeavors.

While a field marshal leads the First, a commandant leads the Fifth, and a *shogun* leads the Seventh. The Legionnaires are a diverse lot, so much so that they resist all attempts to bind them into a single unit. One of the few limitations that Larssen imposed on this diversity of titles and command was a system of "tiers." This reference allows for an easier understanding of the relative levels of authority between, say, a *hatamoto* and a lt. major.

At least, this tier system makes sense to the Legions. I've been studying it for weeks and still haven't figured it out.

The First is the home defense, honor guard and constabulary of the Legions. The only Guardsmen abroad act as military police for the other Legions. Ask an Aussie to describe a Legionnaire and he'll likely mention blue jackets and white berets and the Seven Legions' signature star-burst emblem — he'll describe a Guardsman, a soldier of the First.

The First is the most respected of the Legions, not that the rest of us are unwashed louts. It's simply the prettiest. Soldiers of the First appear in vidcast commercials, sponsoring everything from lager to lasers. Although they're happy to rake in what cash they can, the blue-and-whites are less mercenary than the rest of us war dogs. They don't take independent contract work, mainly carrying out assignments handed down by General Larssen.

THE SECOND — FORTUNE'S KNIGHTS

A new breed of warrior was born centuries ago: the soldier of fortune. We PKs distilled this decades-old pedigree into the Second Legion — the children of a hundred warrior cultures, also called Fortune's Knights.

The Second is the core of the Legions' mercenary crowd. When a country or metacorp wants to hire Legionnaires — as shock troops, special forces or glorified security guards — it turns to the Mercenaries. Whether they're commandos or reserve flankers, troops of the Second serve with distinction...and at a hefty price, yeh?

Although the Mercs take money — cheerfully, even — they also demand some odd fees for difficult contracts. Favors can change hands rather than cash, especially when a client represents someone particularly influential. Some of the Legion's most infamous stories were inspired by such payments. Truth be told, Fortune's Knights are as prone to tall tales as

they are to soldiering — and they do both exceptionally well.

THE THIRD — SUPPORT FORCE ONE

The Third is the smallest of the Legions, generally made up of nonpsychokinetic Gifted, or neuts who are associated with the Legion peripherally. The Third provides support, such as transportation, logistics, latent testing and the like.

THIRD LEGION
RANK AND SYMBOL

This Legion doesn't have a ranking commander. Its members are attached to the other six Legions, instead, and they report directly to General Larssen herself. The group's grown quite a bit in the last couple years, so I imagine it's only a matter of time before the General lets 'em toddle off on their own.

THE FOURTH — VENGEANCE

Some say money is the spark that starts a war, but rage keeps it burning. The Aberrant War was fueled by so much rage that it's still smoldering almost 60 years later. That anger is the motivation of the Fourth.

FOURTH LEGION
RANK AND SYMBOL

The most scattered of the Legions, the Fourth is a dumping ground for fanatical PKs. Sociopathic Aberrant-haters are assigned to the Fourth, and they find kindred spirits there. In a society filled to the brim with anti-Aberrant sentiment, folks this extreme are pretty damn radical.

While the Avengers share a common bond in their hatred, they're the least unified of the Legions. Soldiers of the Fourth are the most likely to take individual assignments, and many work for pathetically little pay, accepting contracts that suit their needs for revenge, justice or atonement. Of course, they're also the most likely to barge in on you uninvited and accuse your wife of being an Aberrant spy. There's rarely any middle ground with the Fourth. They even disturb the rest of us.

THE FIFTH — THE AMERICAS

I'm biased, but in my mind there's no Legion finer than the Fifth. The Americas are sorely in need of defense, not only from Aberrants, but from themselves. North America's full of civvies railing against the Federated States Military. Don't get me started on those glorified policemen! South America's rife with all kind of political and social intrigue. You need a scorecard to know who your friends are on this half of the world, but everyone knows where the Fifth stands.

FIFTH LEGION
RANK AND SYMBOL

Legionnaires recruited from the Americas are stationed in the Western Hemisphere, and comprise the majority of the Fifth's troops. I've heard the brass is worried that we're more loyal to the West than to the Legions. I can only speak for myself: All that's really important to me is a healthy hatred of Aberrants, and the Americas are home to enough of that.

THE SIXTH — EUROPE

Europe is a wreck, a third-class continent. Its people are strong and hopeful, though, and it's the Sixth Legion's job to defend those folks. Second to the Americas, Europe is where most Legion recruits come from. The Sixth has set up as many recruitment stations as it can afford. Considering that most of its funding comes from European donations, the Sixth is on a pretty tight budget. It tests every bloke who applies.

The European Legion concentrates on mobile squads rather than established bases. Sure, it has a few posts, like in London, Zurich-Geneva, Rome and Leningrad, but even Legionnaires stationed there spend much of their time on patrol — particularly along the French border-wastes.

THE SEVENTH — PHOENIX SQUADRON

This is the newest Legion. It was established after the Chromatics' raid on the Karroo colony back in 2113. Before that, the Legionnaires who patrolled space and who were set up on colonies and orbital stations operated independently. After a point, there was just too much going on in space to not have an established presence, yeh?

So, we've got Phoenix Squadron: a collection of hot pilots and brave psions, out there among the stars making sure nothing gets through to us.

Next to the ISRAns, the PKs of the Seventh make up most of the biofighter pilots. They don't stop there, though. Phoenix Squadron has posts on space stations and colonies. The Seventh maintains an HQ on Luna, the better to respond to any threats from the stars. They're a strong-willed, independent lot, I'll give 'em that. Next to the Fourth, soldiers of Phoenix Squadron are the Legions' most balls-to-the-wall outfit. Believe me, coming from another Legionnaire, that's saying something.

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LEGIONS: INTERACTION WITH OTHER ORDERS

Legionnaires are the most direct and forthcoming of all psions. While their manner earns them respect and wins them affection among the normal populace, some orders don't care for the Legions' blunt (and sometimes crude) style.

The Æsculapians and the Legions get along, as their powers complement one another (although Legionnaires tend to consider vitakinetics subordinates rather than equals). ISRAns are also treated with respect; the psychokinetics recognize the need for the clairsentients' advance warnings of trouble.

The Legions and electrokinetics are rivals. Orgotek's psions are almost as combat-savvy as the psychokinetics are. This sometimes leads to juvenile contests of one-upmanship between them, in anything from physical contests to boasting.

The Legions seem to dislike the Norça and Ministry because those orders operate under a veil of secrecy while Legionnaires act in full sight. The biokinetics encourage Legionnaires' disdain for them, while telepaths seem insulted by their treatment. The Ministry claims that use of telepathic abilities is regulated strictly, but the Legions are unconvinced.

MINISTRY OF PSIONIC AFFAIRS (MINISTRY)

a.k.a. telepaths, Ministry agents or tels

— textfile conversion, Terrence Chu, Ministry Liaison to Æon Trinity

Forget what you've heard about telepaths. The amoral, obsessively secretive Ministry telepath is a Western media creation. Furthermore, despite what you've seen on vidcasts, the Ministry isn't a society of cold-blooded "inquisitors" or "agents in black."

In fact, our history is a matter of public record. After becoming the telepath proxy, Rebecca Bue Li set out to gather her order from the upper levels of the Philippine intelligentsia. However, when she realized that the Chinese secret service was attempting to infiltrate the new group, the telepaths studied the nonpsionic espionage agents in their midst. The infiltrators eventually realized that telepaths had been observing them all along. Concluding that it was impossible to work against telepaths in a covert manner, the Chinese State Council offered Bue and her group full access to the resources of China if they would join forces with Beijing. As a gesture of good faith, the Philippines were adopted as a full partner in the Chinese space program.

For her part, Bue realized that the resources and diplomatic leverage of China would offer her almost unlimited opportunity to seek out latent telepaths on Earth, and Aberrants throughout the solar system.

Meditation

— from *Madame Bue's Little Book*

Thought is a net on which we hang. Thought is the ropes that make culture dance. Ride the symbol web. Translate. Control the flow of thought through the brain. Be the birds, flying from mind to mind. Concentrate.

NAME AND FUNCTION

The Ministry of Psionic Affairs is a cabinet-level division of the Chinese government with a variety of branches unto itself. As Psi Minister, Rebecca Bue sits on the Beijing State Council and has access to tremendous financial resources, equipment, information, political leverage and personnel. Individual Ministry agents work within the Chinese federal budget, though, and are required to justify unusual expenses to their superiors.

The Ministry's administrative headquarters is in Beijing, with adjunct academic facilities concentrated at the Shanghai Psi Institute. However, many of the telepaths' training facilities and research staging areas (including the psi institute at Quezon) are

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TELEPATHY

This aptitude involves nothing less than the power to delve into another sentient being's mind. Telepathy is used to communicate regardless of language differences, or to take control of someone's very thoughts. Noetic science lists this aptitude's effects under the empathy, mindshare and psychbending modes.

Empathy: The psion can perceive and even control another person's emotions.

Mindshare: The effects of this mode allow for direct mind-to-mind contact that transcends all other forms of communication.

Psychbending: The psion can assume control of another person's thoughts and memories through a concerted force of will.

ÆON TRINITY MISSION PARAMETERS

Yours is the power to read others' thoughts. They cannot hide their deepest fantasies and darkest fears from your psionic probes. You discover the truths behind the spoken lies. You know the unknowable.

You act as an investigator, separating the guilty from the innocent. You are ever vigilant for those who would act against us, and against humanity as a whole.

You are our ears, learning our enemies' plans and thwarting them before they are even carried out.

located in the Philippines, out of the main political arena. Peripheral administrative centers exist on Mars (dedicated to studying the effects of colony life) and Luna (the center of the Ministry's high-level diplomatic functions, including researching the Qin).

Ministry offices are located nearly everywhere in the Chinese sphere of influence. Order agents are scattered throughout the rest of human space, acting as diplomats, mediators and impartial observers. Every orbital ship that leaves a Chinese launch site carries at least one psi officer who monitors for Aberrant activity during the journey, and who maintains mental contact with flight control.

Many of the Ministry's psi operatives have highly specialized roles within the Chinese realm, acting as messengers, translators, coordinators and information gatherers. Generally, the Ministry's official function in the Chinese government is to ensure the smooth flow of information and authority within and among the various state bureaus and departments.

It's been said that a good tele-path is hard to find. That doesn't just apply to the active ones. Telepathy isn't as common as you might expect, not that I'm at liberty to give you a tally of Ministry operatives. I can say that we may be about as common as your average clairsentient.

FORM AND CONTENT

The Ministry is divided into separate divisions and offices, each of which performs specialized functions with and for the Chinese government and people.

OFFICE OF SEMIOTICS (THE MANDARINS)

Devoted to the exploitation of telepathy's social benefits, the Office of Semiotics spearheads important advances in international relations, foreign diplomacy and domestic affairs. Although OS operatives attend high-level conferences and business negotiations as advisors and moderators, this office's most important function is to serve as an impartial forum for the mediation of international disputes. The recent peace in the Middle East is due in large part to the OS' diplomatic successes and surveillance of global stress points.

The office translates documents and programs from all cultures into the universal language of thought. Nearly all foreign materials arriving in China pass through the OS for translation and correction before being distributed to the Chinese people.

The OS also studies alien races. As the unpleasant encounter with the Coalition shows, first contact situations can be inconclusive without telepathic assistance. The Ministry uses telepathy to achieve a comprehensive understanding of aliens.

THE PSI INSTITUTES

We humbly acknowledge that we are famous for having the best training and recruiting branches of all the orders. I offer our psi institutes as the reasons why. Operating from high-tech campuses outside Shanghai and Quezon City, the Ministry makes a concerted effort to locate latent and nonaffiliated psi-active telepaths from across human space. They are then offered full access to the Ministry's training facilities and financial resources, including instruction in all recognized aptitudes by psions from every order.

The institutes have the best noetic research facilities in the world. Experimental programs at

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THE TRUE STATE OF AFFAIRS

The Trinity has reason to believe that the Ministry is engaged in a secret power struggle with other factions of the Chinese government. Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine just what is going on — psions speculate that the telepaths are fighting other factions of the Chinese espionage establishment for control of certain projects (or even China itself), or simply to prove their own loyalty to the State Council.

This should not lead us to assume that Proxy Bue or the Ministry in general has "lost sight of humanity's goal," as many strident voices claim. After all, if Bue were to stray from that agenda, she and her order would follow the quantakinetics into extinction.

the Shanghai Institute study the alien races and attempt to isolate and eliminate the root causes of Aberrant Syndrome. Research at Quezon tends to focus on "pure psi" experimentation, with various laboratory teams attempting to unlock the genetic factors that determine aptitude, or to even create new, artificial aptitudes.

OFFICE OF PSIONIC SECURITY (THE AVIARY)

The most clandestine of the Ministry divisions and the one that contributes most to our undeservedly bad reputation is the Office of Psionic Security. OPS is China's early warning system and psionic police force. We call this division "the Aviary," where Madame Bue's "birds of the mind" go to roost. OPS psi operatives have a thankless job: moving secretly among the populace and monitoring surface thoughts for criminal and seditious urges and signs of Aberrant activity. Once wrongdoers are identified, the Aviary is empowered to bring them to court or to see that they receive psychiatric care. OPS also serves as the ethics committee for telepaths, monitoring our own people for abuses of power and other violations.

DIPLOMACY AND TRANSLATION

As representatives of the Chinese government, Ministry agents are legally empowered to demand full cooperation from all Chinese citizens and institutions. In practice, however, the extent of cooperation we can expect varies depending on the political ramifications of the situation and the personal agendas involved.

Outside China, our agents often find their national affiliation a mixed blessing. Ministry agents who want to operate effectively in a foreign country must exploit that country's relationship with China. Needless to say, those nations that are not friendly with China (notably India, Brazil and the FSA) aren't very cooperative, often refusing to allow Chinese telepaths to operate freely within their borders.

It is entertaining to see that when such bans are imposed in holodramas, Ministry agents perform covert operations, literally becoming invisible to everyone but other telepaths. In the real world, most goals can be accomplished just as well — if not better — through diplomatic means.

Is Bue Sick?

— *Newsday* holobrief
© 12.18.2119 GN

Telepath Proxy Rebecca Bue Li made a brief return to the public forum today by attending a dinner in honor of the Shanghai Psi Institute's graduating class. It was her first appearance in four months.

The normally radiant and youthful-looking Ms. Bue Li (better known in China as the Minister of Psionic Affairs) is no stranger to controversy, but her erratic behavior at the dinner aroused commentary. "She looks sick," noted the Brazilian ambassador. "Gray as stone."

Despite rumors that the proxy is suffering from an incurable strain of ovarian cancer, Ms. Bue Li's personal physician said only that, "The minister is suffering from nothing more serious than a taxing bureaucratic schedule. She simply has not had much time for public functions." He went on to note that Ms. Bue Li has had a persistent cold, common for the citizens of Beijing at this time of year, which was aggravated by the exhausting task of imprinting the new jump ships only a month ago.

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THE MINISTRY: INTERACTION WITH OTHER ORDERS

The Ministry's agenda is more difficult to determine than that of the Norça, despite the fact that the telepaths are more forthcoming with information than are the secretive biokinetics.

Most orders have cool relations with the Ministry. Orgotek and the Ministry compete in noetic research, which has resulted a general rivalry between the two orders' psions. ISRAns afford the telepaths cautious friendship. The other orders deal with the Ministry curtly, and as briefly as possible. However, even such scant interaction is still quite discomforting to Legionnaires.

NOVA FORÇA DE NACIONALES (THE NEW NATIONAL FORCE)

a.k.a. biokinetics, Norça or shifters

— textfile conversion, Heironymous Dieda, Æon Trinity, Proteus Division

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BIOKINESIS

This aptitude gives the psion complete control of his body. He channels psionic energy to adapt, enhance and even restructure his own physiology. Noeticists divide biokinesis into the adaptation, psychomorphing and transmogrify modes.

Adaptation: The psion uses this mode to protect himself against hostile environments (from being underwater for extended periods of time to being able to maneuver without danger in non-standard gravity).

Psychomorphing: The Gifted can manipulate his internal physiology, growing redundant organs and even subsuming bioware into himself.

Transmogrify: This mode enables the psion to change the shape of his own body. Effects range from creating weapons from the psion's own skin and bones to assuming someone else's appearance.

ÆON TRINITY MISSION PARAMETERS

As a biokinetic, you possess utter control of your physical form. You can change the shape of your face, grow additional limbs, create patterns on your skin and even mend your own wounds.

You are our spies and infiltrators. You venture into hostile territories and adapt yourself to their conditions, be it a frigid tundra or war-torn Europe. You take on whatever role necessary to discover the plots and schemes of our enemies.

You are the ultimate Everyman, a spy beyond compare. You are essential to gaining access to areas that no one else can even approach.

I apologize for not providing the degree of detail you requested. However, the agreements I made with *Pai de Norça* on becoming what I am prohibit me from sharing any more than this.

The *Nova Fôrça de Nacionales* was founded during Columbia's ascendancy, on national pride and belief in rightful ownership. The "Norça" brought a halt to the petty terrorism and crime in Medellín, overtaking the drug lords and their influential infrastructure with sheer presence and promise. Ending the *asesinos de la motos* and other signature gang-war violence almost overnight, we Norça won the respect of both the rich and the poor of South America. The former regard us as a dangerous but necessary asset to their countries' newfound global influence. The latter have their homespun "heroes" at last.

We are the South American equivalent of the Nihonjin Yakuza, the Italian Mafia and the Russian secret service. This analogy isn't entirely accurate, but it should give you an idea of our power and philosophy. We are the storybook Zorros, Three Musketeers and Robin Hoods of our culture, where talk among the masses turns man into myth and myth into legend. *Sí*, we're internationally notorious, and called *"los magicos"* at home. Norça "magicians" reap the rewards of Colombian success: power through obedience, respect and fear.

The Norça are small in number compared to the other orders. I do not know whether this is because biokinesis is a rare aptitude, or because *Pai de Norça* is very careful about who he gives this gift to. Perhaps both, or neither, are correct. It matters not. We are Norça, and our will is strong. We are as many as we need to be.

We can be anyone, nearly anything, and can exist outside the human realm. My biokinetic cousins and I are never squeamish

about merging completely with our surroundings. We are experts in surveillance, infiltration, criminal psychology, biotechnology and psi-adaptation.

The others rarely allow themselves to be seen or recognized for what they are (I, myself, seldom mind). We are racial chameleons who can become African or Nihonjin, or even members of the opposite sex. We are self-mutilators who carve machetes out of our own limbs, and who develop gills to breathe underwater.

We Norça are like any other extended South American family: tightknit and infinitely complex, with layer upon layer of secrets, sexual tensions, nepotism and unspoken demands for respect.

We are born of a patriarchal culture that espouses loyalty, panache, and "honor among thieves." We treat each other — even those who come from other cultures — like long-lost family or childhood friends. All Norça are cousins. No outsider can ever understand the intimacy of controlling one's own body as we can. We can amuse friends, entice lovers, stagger enemies and topple governments.

We are loyal to one another, and to *Pai de Norça* above all else. Never mistake the petty bickering and grandstanding of Norça underlings as discontent; each has been hand-picked by del Fuego to join his exclusive ranks. We would give our lives to protect his power. The bonds among the Norça are stronger than any other ties, and even extend to those who have left the family amicably.

Our power extends far beyond its drug-trade roots. Such enterprise, legal in much of South America, but still outlawed throughout most of settled space, creates great revenue for the Norça. However, it is a very small part of what we are. In fact, fewer and fewer of the Gifted take part in the business, leaving it to our normal cousins.

Norça presence in various countries, colonies and orbital stations is both anticipated and dreaded. We go to such places mainly to investigate possible Aberrant incursions, although we pursue other agendas when the need arises. While the populace welcomes such intervention for the most part, the governments

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NORÇA MANEUVERS

— Analysis: Craig Bartholomew, Proteus Division, 11.21.2118

Norça are known to have frequent clandestine meetings in certain places across settled space. We've confirmed meeting points in El Poblalo in Columbia, a nondescript warehouse in downtown Cairo, the Russian underworld café *Sergei* on the coast of the Black Sea, and an Eclipse Media editing office in Yutu Yinchon.

Still, there is no possible way to trace where all Norça influences may reach nor how deeply they may run. The "Amazon Canopy" now blankets known subsects of Russia, the FSA, the Middle East and the Turkish Empire. Suspected Norça infiltration has also been linked to Australia, Mars and even Nippon.

In fact, our investigations show that the Norça seem to have an intense interest relating to Nippon and things Nihonjin.

OBC

Proxy del Fuego: *Pai de Norça*

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective*
© 2112 OBC

When Giuseppe del Fuego was transformed into the biokinetic proxy, it seemed as if he had awaited the event for some time and was annoyed that it was so long in coming. Since 2103, del Fuego has gathered his order about him using the subtle, intrusive tendrils of the legalized South American drug network in which he was already involved, bringing the strongest minds in psi and the new technocracy to his side. The "Father of the Norça," Proxy del Fuego controls the most powerful underworld family of the Western Hemisphere and quite possibly the world.

PSI AND PSI ORDERS

find it next to impossible to monitor a Norça's comings and goings without psion assistance.

A problem with psions in general, this is magnified with us. Keeping tabs on people who can literally change their identities is next to impossible, requiring a skilled psion or specialized bioware. The other orders aren't always willing or able to help nervous officials in this regard, and *Pai de Norça* certainly doesn't have the time to bother. We have seen a rise in the number of freelance psions retained by certain governments (in the UAN and FSA, most notably). Such measures do not bother us overly much, although they do hinder our capabilities.

Some governments are friendly toward my cousins, or at least show deference to *Pai de Norça*. We care not for such special treatment, as it comes with its own restrictions. We prefer to do our work on our own terms.

We *are* the New Force of South America, with control over indigenous terraforming and biotech projects. We act behind the scenes in foreign and off-world affairs, and slip in and out of international strongholds without a trace. We are far more effective than any of our competitors. Governments and metacorporations pay high prices to procure even a single service from a Norça. To have one on staff is the ultimate personal luxury, but one which must be kept secret.

Norça independents like myself are regarded with suspicion by our cousins, but are tolerated as long as we remain within the proxy's strict guidelines on nationalism and loyalty. The independent operator who lines his pockets with the wrong currency, or who steps outside the lines of propriety is disowned, hunted down by his own kind, and killed publicly...graphically. Bring shame upon the Norça, and there is no mercy and no escape.

Perhaps now you understand why I can tell you no more.

The Greatest Honor

— *Newsday* interview, Proxy del Fuego © 11.1.2119 GN

"The other [orders] are incapable or unwilling to fulfill their obligation — to protect all that is Earth, whatever the cost. That is *our* honor."

Exhibit B, audio and holotape format

— MMI News cameraman Joe Seinne's momentary lapse of judgment that resulted in the ongoing civil trial of 2113:

"Unless you want me to carve a pair of these in you, I'd turn the camera off. *Now!*"

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NORÇA: INTERACTION WITH OTHER ORDERS

The Norça have no cause for dispute with any of the other orders. They work closely with Æsculapians and Orgotek employees in a number of areas, and consider the Ministry to be a kindred spirit. However, the biokinetics refuse cooperation and assistance at almost every turn. Such isolation makes relations between Norça and other psions increasingly difficult, and sometimes counterproductive.

Biokinetics who desert the Norça without Proxy del Fuego's expressed consent are considered traitors to the order and to the South American people. Such rogues are hunted down without mercy and either executed publicly or returned to del Fuego's remote facilities (it's unknown what happens to them at that point). By contrast, those who leave with their proxy's blessing may venture anywhere unmolested by their Norça cousins, although they apparently may never return to the fold.

ORGOTEK

a.k.a. electrokinetics, EKs, teks or zappers

— textfile conversion, Arthur Bengali, Æon Trinity, Neptune Division

We're supposed to relay detailed information on the orders. I've been working at Orgotek for almost four years and I've learned little more than what is provided by corporate outlines and press releases. If you're looking for skeletons in closets and dirt under rugs, you won't find it here. I know it sounds strange, but Orgotek's squeaky clean — as much as any multibillion-yuan metacorporation can be, anyway.

The story of Alex Cassel's transformation from unassuming-yet-brilliant college student to powerful-yet-easygoing psion is well-documented, especially in the FSA. It helps that he describes his life in a vague but entertaining fashion in Orgotek's corporate profile.

Heir to a family fortune and social connections, Cassel laid the groundwork for his order during his college years. He enlisted school friends to join him in creating World Enterprises, Inc., and in doing so founded a holding company that would grow to become Orgotek, "The EK Company," in less than 20 years. Once the order was financially secure, Cassel explored the other gift that the proxies had: biotechnological formulae and processes. The information he had and the experiments he conducted on organic material turned Orgotek into a bioware empire, and initiated the biotech revolution.

CORPORATE PROFILE

The electrokinetic order is funded and administered entirely by the Orgotek Corporation, the world leader in bioware manufacture and design. Orgotek, in turn, is wholly owned by Alexander Cassel and members of his personal circle — er, board of directors. Orgotek employs electrokinetics and ensures that all of their basic economic needs are met. In return, the corporation hires select teams of psions to outside interests as consultants.

The Orgotek corporate headquarters is currently in the FSA's New York arcology. However, I think Cassel's becoming frustrated with the Big Apple's accelerating decay. He's taken steps to move the main offices to Orgotek's San Francisco regional headquarters. Other regional HQs include Montreal and Vancouver, with extranational headquarters in Bangkok, Cairo, Olympus, Rome, Sidney, Wanjing and

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ELECTROKINESIS

The psion channels electrical energy and even manipulates the electromagnetic spectrum with this aptitude (which is also referred to as EK). Electromanipulation, photokinesis and technokinesis are the three recognized EK modes.

Electromanipulation: This mode involves controlling electrical impulses in organic beings.

Photokinesis: This mode's effects are used to perceive and direct the flow of energy across the electromagnetic spectrum. A skilled Gifted can create holograms spontaneously and can generate lasers by focusing his will.

Technokinesis: The psion taps into and controls energy flow through mechanical technology, from computers to spacecraft.

ÆON TRINITY MISSION PARAMETERS

The electromagnetic spectrum is your plaything. You manipulate the flow of electricity in the human body, in bioware and in hardtech devices. You tune into broadcast transmissions and generate deadly lasers merely by concentrating.

You are a technical expert. You penetrate even the most heavily guarded OpNet nodes to gather information. You take control of opponents' weapons to give your teammates the edge in a firefight. You repair and manipulate equipment of any kind, human or alien, hard- or biotech.

Meet the Prexy Proxy

— Corl Heisler with Alex Cassel, *The Painful Truth* © 2119 MMI

"He's just a guy, yeh?" his employees routinely tell reporters. "Sure, he can call down lightning and talk to electrons and stuff, but otherwise, Alex Cassel's just a regular person."

That explains the unique allure of the Orgotek Prexy — a colloquialism derived from "proxy" and "president." Some are as handsome as Alex Cassel, but none are so accessible. Some are smarter, but none are so good at explaining the subquantum universe to the public. Some are richer, but few seem to enjoy it so openly — and so innocently — as Alex Cassel. Paradoxically, the CEO is a cultural icon largely because he seems so...real.

He's the boy next door, a blend of racial heritage, the last of an otherwise extinct species of All-Americans. A regular guy who calls up lightning.

PT: The culture theorists call you the father of anima culture. How does that feel?

AC: I can't take credit for anima, but I love it! Anima is about the melting of borders and classifications. I think it's a fantastic idea that all the rigid assumptions of the last few centuries — things like countries, federal governments, the relationship between human beings and our tools — are really more pliable than people think. If biotech can melt a few distinctions, great!

PT: And your critics...?

AC: ...have a vested interest in enforcing the distinctions. They want to stay where they are forever: on top. It's an unnatural position and they know it, so they get desperate.

PT: Part of the anima aesthetic is combining archaic symbols with advanced tech. Is Orgotek riding this techno-primitive wave?

AC: I'm not sure that's useful. True, we built Orgosoft Farms on natural bio-galvanic vortices. But it's not because of "ley lines" or "dragon lines"; only because that's how the world happens to look when seen with what we call "spectrum sight." Once you see that, it's simple common sense to take advantage of those currents when situating a biotech plant.

Xianggang. Assorted Orgotek biofactories, auxiliary plants and branch offices are likewise scattered across the Earth and the permanent colonies, with a large number located in the FSA and Quebec.

The Prexy himself spends most of his time commuting among New York, San Francisco and the various Orgosoft Farms. In his absence, everyday corporate decisions are made by the board of directors, which is composed of Cassel's wife Ellayne and seven of the couple's closest private Gifted associates (not all of whom are electrokinetics).

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Orgotek's public relations team is second to none. It's been instrumental to making EKs universally respected and appreciated — except by the suits in the FSA, of course. Members of high-profile Operations teams in Europe and Australia are even treated like celebrities. Europeans, in particular, still honor the teks who died trying to stop the *Esperanza* crash, and Australians admire Orgotek enthusiasm, which is considered akin to the energetic Legion spirit. Even the Nihonjin admire aspects of the EK philosophy (while deploring the *gaijin* lack of discipline).

On the other hand, despite being one of the most profitable corporations in the FSA, Orgotek is on extraordinarily poor terms with the North American military-corporate establishment. Cassel appears to be concerned not only with his employees' quality of life, but also with the squalid conditions of the urban communities that surround Orgotek installations. This concern makes him an unwelcome figure in FSA corporate society. Furthermore, the Orgotek board's tendency to take controversial political stands —

WORLD ENTERPRISES, INC.

The first of Prexy Cassel's companies, WEI is the dual administrative and public relations arm of the Orgotek empire. WEI attracts ambitious and talented psions of all aptitudes, and coordinates Operations teams' activities. Corporate strategists investigate possible fields for Orgotek expansion, and spin doctors handle image control.

ORGOSOFT FARMS

Orgosoft is the source of most of the Orgotek corporate mythology and mystique. When people talk about "Orgotek," they usually refer to the gigantic biotech plants and ideals of the original Orgosoft Farm. The main facility is located in northern New Mexico, and is where Cassel spliced the first bioware matrices. Contemporary biotech manufacturers tend to follow in the Orgosoft image: earnest, enthusiastic and suffused with reverence for all forms of life.

TEKNE GROUP

Tekne oversees the Orgotek hardware industry. Most psions in Tekne are technokinesis specialists. The stereotypical Tekne employee is a lovably uncommunicative person who prefers to relate to the outside world through tools. Indeed, Orgotek's dormitory environment allows the reclusive Gifted to live productive (if protected) lives interfaced with machinery. Tekne employees are also infamous for their acerbic wit and "good-natured" cynicism. It's not near as charming as they think, if you ask me.

LUMEN

Orgotek's smallest division and the focus of photokinetic study, Lumen is a world leader in electromagnetic research, especially in the high end of the spectrum. These psions and scientists consider the fragmentary reports on Chromatics "fascinating" rather than frightening, and are working on techniques for "jamming" or even "hacking into" linguistic structures in the Chromatic brain. Other current research projects include holographic nanotech and "extra-satisfactory" computer intelligence.

OPERATIONS

While psions hired specifically for active duty serve the bulk of their time in Operations teams, all active Orgotek employees are required to perform at least two days of training and monitoring every month. The administration and research divisions could consider these duties a chore, but they actually seem to look forward to their monthly tours (and the teks haven't complained, at least not vocally).

ORGOTEK: HA!

ONE WORLD, ONE MIND?

— Advertisement from *Global Watchdog*, 5.2118 (Baltimore, FSA)

They tell you their biological technology is the best thing that humanity has ever created. No pollution, no energy waste, no mess, no fuss.

But did humans actually create the stuff?

They tell you it's "cutting edge," "the yeh thing" to let their biological technology form its parasitic bonds with your nervous system.

Think about it.

Paid for by the Committee for Truth

such as on the EK airlift to the Pueblo Nation in 2115 and '16 — makes Orgotek even less popular with the FSA government.

Most Orgotek employees (especially those from the FSA) are bewildered by the way the American establishment treats them, but follow official corporate policy on the matter — that the FSA establishment is to be pitied rather than feared. Those Gifted who come to Orgotek from other parts of the world and from settled space often have less tolerance for such mistreatment, which can sometimes aggravate domestic relations.

Orgotek's security contracts are due for government review in just over a year. I've heard that Cassel is planning to declare the company an extranational corporation rather than submit to an order to disband the Orgotek private-security division. If the company does go international, the FSA economy might be endangered. Meanwhile, federal and corporate propaganda campaigns against Cassel and his EK company continue.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Electrokinetics are surprisingly common, in relative terms, and are second only to psychokinetics in number. Some claim this is because Cassel is willing to take almost any latent, no matter how borderline. That sounds like more FSA propaganda to me. Sure, the various Orgotek divisions employ over 100,000 people, but only about 10% of them are EKs — and psions who have come over from other orders.

The majority of psions employed by Orgotek are tek natives of the FSA and Quebec. A substantial number of Orgotek psions are also Nihonjin; Orgotek is friendly with a number of the Psi Nippon enclaves. Corporate recruiting brings in prospective EK candidates from all over the world.

After being triggered, new psions are given the choice to join the company on a contractual basis (the usual term between renewals is four years). If they choose not to join Orgotek, there are no hard feelings. In fact, I've heard that many of Cassel's best friends are "freelance" teks.

Orgotek handles all education and training, both psi-specialized and professional, once a psion hires on. The company also assigns new operatives expense accounts good for room and board at any Orgotek residential buildings. Although psions aren't required to stay in employee residences, many consider the communal atmosphere one of the greatest rewards of belonging to the Orgotek "family."

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ORGOTEK: INTERACTION WITH OTHER ORDERS

Orgotek and ISRA are vocal in urging the cooperation of the orders. In recent years, it seems that Orgotek's aggressiveness has driven other orders from it rather than bringing them to it. However, electrokinetics have been instrumental to the advancement of biotech, primarily the new jump ships, so the other orders maintain polite political ties to ensure access to the craft.

ISRA and the Legions work regularly with Orgotek in the field, despite any personal differences. Additionally, the Ministry has engaged in noetic research with EK scientists, which has had some very productive results, but which has also led to clashes and competition. Otherwise, the orders seem content to leave Orgotek to its own devices.

UPEO WA MACHO (THE HORIZON)

a.k.a. teleporters, Upeo, porters or jumpers

Psions of the teleportation order possessed the rare ability to transfer themselves almost instantly from one place to another. The truly skilled among them could take a number of passengers and even large craft with them.

The minimum latency required to manifest teleportation abilities was significantly higher than that needed for the other orders. The Upeo was therefore the second-smallest order, having slightly more members than the Chitra Bhanu. At the time of their disappearance, the Upeo numbered a few hundred. There was a constant clamor for their services from the rest of humanity, which often forced teleporters to almost literally be in several places at the same time.

Proxy Bolade Atwan was no stranger to the demands of public service. Her years on the Sokoto, Nigeria police force put her in good stead when it came time to organize and supervise her order. And Atwan trained her charges well. Porters were intrepid and confident explorers. They took to the challenge of the void with a fervor matched only by that of a Legionnaire in hot pursuit of an Aberrant.

Humanity has the Upeo to thank for its accelerated expansion into the stars, for interstellar travel and for first contact with alien beings. Perhaps more than any other psi order, the Upeo wa Macho encouraged humanity to work together to achieve a common goal.

Since the Upeo vanished in 2114, there have been hundreds of supposed teleporter sightings, but none has confirmed the return of the missing order. Despite such disappointments, we will not — must not — give up the hope that the Upeo wa Macho will someday return.

An Inspiration for the Future

— Excerpt: Teleporter Proxy Bolade Atwan in her Universal Address 9.31.2106

"Upeo wa Macho" is not only a promise, it is an inevitable evolution. I chose to name my Gifted brothers and sisters after our African "horizon" because that is our inspiration. As all humanity strives to achieve new standards of greatness, so too do we, as humans reborn, aspire to fulfill our destiny.

We crave nothing less than to reach beyond something that was once so distant it was considered unknowable. Tomorrow, the unknowable may rest in the palm of our hands.

CHITRA BHANU

a.k.a. quantakinetics, chibs or dark psions

Chitra Bhanu, the quantakinetic order, revealed its presence along with the other seven orders in 2106. The order was led by prominent Bombay psychologist S. K. Bhurano, and its members were apparently able to manipulate nuclear forces. It seems that quantakinetics were able to use psi energy in a manner similar to the way Aberrants manipulate the universe, by rearranging atomic compositions — by corrupting nature itself. In the end, these dark pursuits caused the Chitra Bhanu's downfall.

Under the aegis of Chitra Bhanu, and with the help of vitakinetic Proxy Zweidler, Bhurano laid the groundwork for modern noetic science and the investigation of the subquantum universe. However, Chitra Bhanu is best known in India for its attempt to philosophically unify Shaivism, Vishnaivism and Zoroastrianism with contemporary noetic-quantum physics. The order also funded a number of clinics and research facilities for the treatment of Aberrant Syndrome and rare psi dysfunctions.

Rumors that Chitra Bhanu was "soft" on Aberrants surfaced as early as 2107, when "rehabilitated," minor Aberrants known from the war were sighted visiting the Bombay clinic. Over the next two years, stories of "insane" practices and "dangerous science" continued to circulate, along with the inevitable rumor that Bhurano had found a cure for Aberrant Syndrome.

Bhurano's last public appearance was at the first Noetic Conference in 2109, at which she gave a lecture on the moral implications of the subquantum universe. Shortly thereafter, conclusive evidence revealed that the Chitra Bhanu organization was in league with Aberrants and had allied itself with them.

New Delhi feared Aberrant intervention on behalf of the Chitra Bhanu. Legions, the Office of Psionic Security, Orgotek Operations teams and squads of Norça were therefore enlisted to enforce the declaration that Chitra Bhanu disband. Most of the quantakinetics, including Bhurano, refused to surrender peaceably and were killed while resisting arrest.

ABERRANTS

— Lectures of Professor Solomon Pringle, Proteus Division

I'm here to make you understand one thing and one thing only: Aberrants are the single greatest menace known to humanity, even more so now in the 22nd century than ever before. Fact is, Aberrants are the worst evil humanity has ever faced, and are most frightening because they were once us — human. Horrifying that in all our exploration of the universe and travels into deep space, the most dangerous thing we have encountered is ourselves.

While everyone must know the depth of evil that Aberrants represent, as a psion, you need to be especially conscious of this. Sooner or later, you will come face to what passes for face with Earth's 60-year-old legacy: an Aberrant returned from exile in the unknown reaches of space, hell-bent to destroy you, me and the whole goddamned human race. And you have to stop it — or die trying.

I'm not pulling any punches here. I'll let your orders and proxies hold your hands and pat you on the head. I'm going to tell you exactly what you're up against, because if you're going to die, you might as well know why. That's more than can be said for the people on Research Outpost Vesta.

You know the basics: Aberrants were the heroes of the 21st century. About 100 years ago, they were lauded like you are today as the protectors and benefactors of humanity. The Æon Covenant of the time worked with these "heroes" for the general good. Something went wrong in Aberrant physiology, though. The source of their powers, a structure in the brain called the Mazarin-Rashoud node, named after its discoverers, mutated across the board. Aberrants, who were once sane and who protected normal people, started to abuse their powers and finally went mad, slaughtering thousands. Others who emerged later simply went insane upon manifesting their abilities. Humanity's fight to survive against these things became the Aberrant War.

They didn't show us any mercy. For every one Aberrant killed, thousands of normal people — soldiers and civilians — were murdered. The war went on for years because people had no choice but to defend themselves or die. Hell, the Aberrant Mungu Kuwasha interfaced with and wiped out the global computer network simply because he could — thousands of years of cultural, historical and social record destroyed because of a solitary maniac's prank.

And that, of course, was the straw that broke the camel's back. Crashing the OpNet spurred the Chinese government to hand down the Ultimatum in 2061: Aberrants must stop the insanity or everything would be nuked. Pretty bold move, but the Chinese meant it.

The Aberrants left Earth, supposedly for other planets and places that they could reach with their powers — and without biosuits or jump ships (remember that when you're floating in space in *your* suit, outside *your* jump ship — how vulnerable *you* are). We were left to pick up the pieces, to rebuild an Earth in ruins. Many of us, daunted by the sheer devastation, abandoned Earth altogether with hopes of a new start in space.

The last we knew of the Aberrants was an ultimatum of their own: "We'll be back." That was 60 years ago. It took them a while, but the Aberrants kept their word — they're back.

Their first new attack on the human race was at Research Outpost Vesta. I lost two Trinity colleagues that day, including my wife. I hate the Aberrants with every fiber of my being. That's why the Trinity assigns me to these lectures, to make you understand the absolute evil of what you face.

The strikes continued from there, always on isolated stations and colonies, always using hit-and-run tactics. At first, we didn't know what was attacking. We had yet to encounter any alien races back in those days, but we expected to at any time as we explored space. It seemed that we had finally made first contact, and it was hostile. However, "alien" tissue gathered proved that these beings were, in fact, human. Apparently years of inbreeding, festering in exile and their insanity-made-

manifest (a mutation now called Aberrant Syndrome or "taint") turned the Aberrants from human-seeming into absolute monstrosities.

The attacks continue today, still in guerrilla style, still vicious, still without mercy. The majority of Aberrant attacks focus on the orbital stations and colonies at the borders of settled human (and Qin, as it turns out) space. Aberrants are becoming better organized, though, their assaults striking with greater frequency and deeper into our space — on the orbital stations, on Luna, on Earth itself.

The devastating attack just a few years ago on the space station *Esperanza*— in orbit around Earth — and the resulting deaths of millions of Europeans is undeniable and terrifying proof of how close the Aberrants can get to us. As is their recent attack on our station orbiting Luna. How did the Aberrants know we had a jump ship base there? How did they know to strike when the ship was about to start testing, when we're so close to getting back out to deep space? And most frightening of all, are the Aberrants of old still alive and out for revenge?

Questions with no answers. That's why Æon needs you, why humanity needs you. The powers you've been blessed with allow you to stand against the Aberrants like no human could in the 21st century, or even today. Aberrants' powers seem to defy the laws of physics themselves. As they could 100 years ago, Aberrants can will something into existence on an atomic level, and seem to have become more powerful than ever. From what the noeticists say, while you psions can't break those physical laws, you can still bend them with your strength of will alone. Singly, you're not as strong as most Aberrants, but you have the strength of each other, of your fellow psions — of unity.

Now that Æon has helped your orders get the jump ships online, it's your duty to carry the fight to the Aberrants. Drive them from Earth once and for all. Make them pay for the crimes they've committed against humanity.

Æon is counting on you, but you can count on us, too. We are your lifeline. You can call upon the Trinity for backup, to seek information from our data banks, to get equipment that you absolutely need to carry on the fight. Even if your orders can't provide for you, Æon will be there. While our resources aren't infinite, what we have is at your disposal. We have bases and agents across Earth, the Moon and throughout known space. We're your friends. We're all a team.

On a personal note, if you come away from these blatherings of a hateful, lonely old man with nothing else, at least remember this: Aberrants are your mortal enemies. Don't expect pity, mercy or courtesy from them. As far as they're concerned, you and your forebears threw them out of Eden. They haven't forgotten; they hold onto that alone, if anything, of their former lives. It's what defines them. They want revenge. They'll kill you and they absolutely will not stop until they've killed us all. Understand that and every choice you make in the cold reality of space will be absolutely clear.

Archeology Division

— Anthropology Newsletter
holofile vol. 161, #3, 3.2118

In this month's column we include a "Report from the Field" from Finlay O'Brien (Cairo). He has uncovered a burial site that seems to indicate that 21st-century Aberrant-controlled cults dismembered living human infants and consumed their entrails as part of some initiation ritual. Apparently this horrifying practice of modern anthropophagy was only the beginning of the ritual processes. O'Brien has evidence that the rituals became even more grotesque and destructive as cult members rose in status and rank.

On a lighter note, our members are reminded that the forms for submitting abstracts for the annual meetings are in this issue; the usual April 1 deadline approaches rapidly....

Stahu ENTERTAINMENT

The Titans Return

— Textfile excerpt: Paolo Herren,
***Twilight of the Gods* © 2116 Sirius Press**

Typhon. Briareus. Cronus. Ymir.

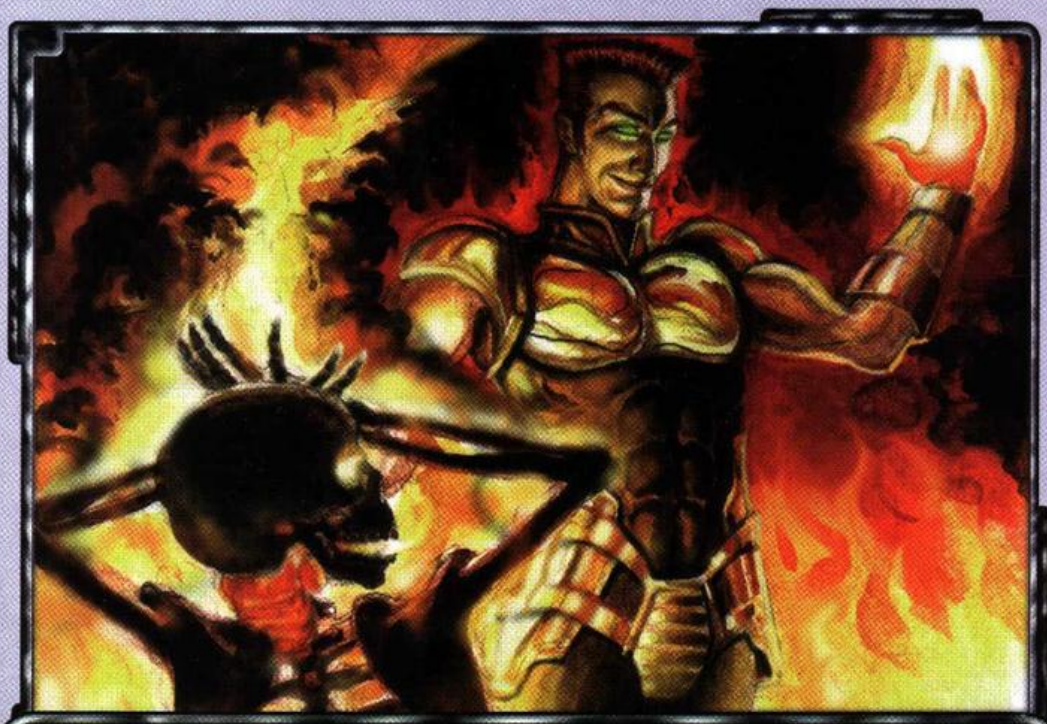
These are the gods, emblems of the ideas that raise humans above their animal roots and reflections of the fears that lower humans back into the slime. And yet even the gods sprang from the titans, the giants, the primordial monsters in the dark.

It's an old myth, really, an id kind of thing. Father sires son; son rebels against father; son supplants father — hell, the Greeks even threw in a castration scene — son takes mother, son throws emasculated daddy in lightless dungeon, cue the wailing and gnashing of teeth. And the Old Ones, the Titans, the Jotun, the primordial, inchoate Things, they stay in Sheol or Niflheim or Tarterus, never — well, almost never — to trouble the New Order again.

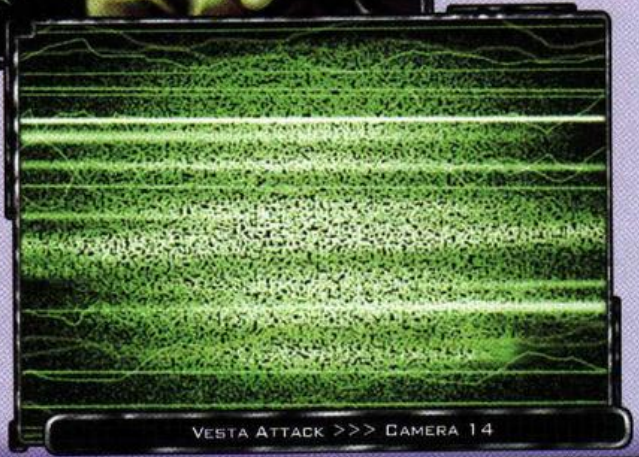
On January 28, 2104, out in the dark beyond Saturn, our titans came home from Tarterus.

Every schoolchild learns the Speech of Divis Mal, right up there with the Lagos Manifesto. The archfiend itself, bullets atomizing around its too-perfect body, ionic hellfire blasting the secretary-general to a twitching skeleton as it spoke, culminating in that immortal line: "Your legacy is our future." It raised its fist, like some old newsreel Nazi or Nation of Islam leader, and let the secretary-general's bones collapse around its feet, a god casting dice for our destiny. And then, from all over the world, they rose into the sky like the aurora borealis, and were gone.

Only the old-timers remember the Age of the Aberrants. From what I hear — not that getting anything out of 'em's easy, 'cause even with Æsculapian science, they're getting a tad senile — it was an age as wondrous and terrifying and…well, golden…as any "once upon a time." I mean, you had the normal people like



"Your legacy is our future." >>> Divis Mal at U.N. 2061



So you watched the footage. You interacted with Aberrant sites on the local OpNet and you logged onto *New York 2020*. You and your friends ran around in the arcos, screaming out atomic disruption noises, pretending you were The Blood Queen, *Cestus Pax*, The Colony.

I know I did. I was Overkill. My friend was Maxx Mauler. Every weekend in Luna Park we bombarded each other with imaginary rays from the wrong side of the electromagnetic spectrum, and then, when the sun went down, we went home for dinner.

The scientists at Research Outpost Vesta aren't coming home for dinner.

After the Aberrants left the planet, we...well, we just forgot about 'em. Like that aster-

you and me, and among them walked gods.

Yeah, gods. I know what some of you are thinking: "Yeah, right, Herren. Aberrants were human beings just like the rest of us. They just had that little gland in their forebrain — that Mazarin-Rashoud node — that let them do...."

Anything.

Any damned thing they wanted.

Don't tell me that didn't turn you on as a kid. You may have looked at those old holos of *T. Rex* or the great whites before we drove 'em extinct, seen those teeth like industrial grinders, and been scared. But you thought it was cool. You imagined your enemies shredded in the monsters' maw, and you thought, "I wish I was a predatory machine of doom, feared by all who dare to cross my path."

oid that can theoretically rain down on us like the wrath of God and smash us into sediment with the dinosaurs. Objectively, we know it's out there. Objectively, we know that planets do get hit by celestial bodies, and that if this happens, our time is over. In practical terms, we don't want to think about the possibility of bad things happening, so we ignore it.

The scientists at Research Outpost Vesta paid for this ignorance with their lives.

I wonder what went through those poor fools' minds when they picked up the perimeter alert and saw those things plowing through the void under their own power, without life-support suits? When they deployed the defenses and watched the things cut through 'em like paper? When they heard the creaking of metal, and realized the things were ripping the whole station apart like a house of cards?

Wonder if the poor fools ever figured out why it happened? Far as we can tell, it was all to deliver a message.

Vesta killed one of the things. Just one. They had to hit it with a pulse cannon. A damn antitank weapon had to be deployed to put the bastard down. Yeah, I know what it said on the report, that crap about government unity and what have you. It's bullshit. Aberrants trashed the installation, murdered most of the scientists inside, and held the military in a standoff until one finally got popped with a damned experimental weapon.

And the rest of 'em, at that point, chose to leave. Scared? Or did they just feel they'd made their point?

That point being, I think, was "we're coming back, and here we are." There's going to be a war —a revolution. Or maybe an *evolution*. You know, looking at that footage of Research Outpost Vesta, I feel an awful lot like a Neanderthal right now.

You see, we don't know what the hell happened to them out there in the dark. Because that bit of *Homo sapiens* DNA we recovered from the dead Aberrant's carapace was the only thing about it that could pass for human.

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

"Alien" Autopsy

— Æon Trinity medplex, SubChicago arcology, 2.7.2104

Repeated tests verify that the "alien entity" is essentially identical to human DNA. Clinical and objective interpretation and recording of findings reveal extensive somatic mutations.

"Alien" physiology does actually deny a biological connection to *Homo sapiens*, although the severe mutations give that impression to the naked eye. Epidermis is a translucent gray-pink. The frontal bone of the skull is distended severely. The exterior of joints and the spinal column sprout what appear to be short, prehensile tentacles. Limbs are gnarled and atrophied. Fingers and toes are elongated and flaccid, apparently to function more like tentacles than human digits.

Further, reports from the attack on Research Outpost Vesta identify other creatures consisting entirely of tentacle-like protrusions.

If this creature was once human, as difficult as that is to believe, it is about as true to its evolutionary origins as *Homo sapiens* are to the primordial ooze from which we evolved.

Addendum: Æsculapian Proxy Dr. Matthieu Zweidler to Æon Trinity

This creature was once human, as incredible as it seems. One of the Aberrants returned, as we warned the Trinity Council would be the case. The cause for the creature's apparent mutation is unknown to us, and has yet to be explained by our patrons. More information will be forthcoming when it is available.

For now, one fear haunts me: If this was once an Aberrant, and they have returned, how will we be able to recognize them? The Aberrants of the 21st century were ostensibly human and had the power to change matter and energy on an atomic level. If our current attackers still possess that power, they may be able to revert their apparent mutation and assume human appearance. If they cannot do so, why not? And if they can do so, are they among us already?

Aberrants Attack Orbital Station

— *Newsday* holobrief © 4.8.2119, GN

Reports have been confirmed that the explosions that occurred today on a station orbiting Luna, were indeed the result of Aberrant attack — the third in as many days. Military and Æon Trinity sources report that at least five Aberrant beings attacked a military testing installation. Insiders claim the orbital base, constructed on an asteroid captured and moved into lunar orbit, housed one of the experimental new jump ships rumored to be in design for some months now.

The other two attacks were staged against separate, apparently unrelated targets: an Orgotek manufacture facility on Belt Outpost 17, and an ISRA training institution.

Most shocking about the attack is the appearance of the Aberrant thought to be "The Colony," known ally of Divis Mal. The infamous Divis Mal was, of course, the last Aberrant to leave Earth after the Aberrant War, after staging a horrific display of power before the United Nations.

Courtney Post, Æon Trinity representative, stated, "Increased Aberrant attacks such as these indicate a growth in their power. We don't know at this time whether there is a connection between their targets, or if this is a sign of better organization. Rest assured, the Trinity will assist the psi orders in investigating this matter thoroughly."

Ms. Post did not confirm whether it was indeed the Colony returned. If it was, this reporter wonders is Divis Mal still lives. If so, how long can it be before he returns as well?

ABERRANT ATTACK >>> GN NEWS ARCHIVE

Humans are wonderful, adaptive creatures. We are innovative, obstinate, arrogant, inquisitive and compassionate. We have survived centuries of warfare, strife, famine, plague and pestilence, and emerged stronger from adversity. Among our most recent achievements, we have crawled from the surface of Mother Earth and have set foot among the stars. We have confirmed the existence of alien races. We have unlocked humanity's psionic potential. And we have discovered the implicate order, the very fabric of the universe that may help us unravel the greatest questions posed to the human race. Our future stands before us, filled with potential.

However, overshadowing this promise is a threat greater than any ever faced in our long, tumultuous history: the return of the Aberrants. To truly understand this danger, we must look to our past. For, despite all our accomplishments, we are prone to repeating our mistakes.

Indeed, that is one of the primary reasons why the Æon Trinity was founded. The organization has helped steer humanity's course for two centuries, to stay on the high road during times of hardship and to help humanity arrive at its fateful destination.

Still, there is much beyond Æon's control. Only by understanding the errors of the past and the events of the present can we hope to gain command of our future.

The following, then, is an attempt to investigate recent events in hopes of finding salvation and unity in what could be the darkest of eras.

Times Past

With the Æon Trinity's establishment two centuries ago, it was hoped that a handful of knowledgeable visionaries would lend their talents to benefiting humanity's future. The immediate results were not as rewarding as hoped; the social and political forces that led up to the Second World War, for example, were already in motion and impossible to stop. Still, Æon's subtle maneuverings and charities demonstrably affected the conflict's course. As the decades passed, the organization grew in members, influence and wisdom. One hundred years after Æon's inception, while most people knew nothing of the group, their lives had nonetheless been touched by it in some way.

This isn't to say that Æon had grown large enough to unify humanity to withstand any adversity. However, the foundation laid did enhance our ability to fend off that greatest of all threats — Aberrants.

We do well to remember that Aberrants were initially considered humans with extraor-

Hyper-fusion

— Dr. Astra Schache, *Under the Microscope* © 2118 OBC

So-called hyper-fusion was invented in the early 21st century and revolutionized all aspects of power production and consumption. The ability to generate electricity sufficient to power a town, in a device no larger than a typical bathroom, was liberating to say the least.

The fusion process begins with the extraction of deuterium (heavy hydrogen, often called "deuce") from water, which is channeled into a Birlesme containment chamber where it is brought to temperatures exceeding one million degrees Celsius, and forced to fuse.

While efficiency has not approached theoretical limits, even a modest drop of water contains enough energy to provide power to a medium-sized building. Compared to archaic sources of power such as fission and fossil fuels, hyper-fusion is extremely clean and relatively safe.

dinary powers, not vicious, incomprehensible mutations. Indeed, unthinkable as it may seem today, the early 21st century portrayed Aberrants as wondrous beings. Aside from performing pyrotechnic displays and feats of strength, Aberrants were responsible for societal advancements. The ubiquitous modern energy source known as hyper-fusion was, after all, developed in 2022 by Dr. Soguk Birlesme — a brilliant man later proven to be an Aberrant. His revolutionary energy conversion process was a key component of the United States' first fusion-powered spacecraft, unveiled only two years later.

Indeed, hyper-fusion was the means to building viable intrasolar colonies. Various organizations developed plans for orbital colonies at the Lagrange points and on Luna; the U.S. led the way, establishing Olympus Base near the Moon's south pole in 2031. It was a brief time of technological progress and trade in near space.

However, as more Aberrants emerged, and their manifestations grew increasingly bizarre and frightening, they revealed a previously hidden malevolence (later termed the Aberrant Syndrome). The overwhelming evidence we gained from the study of Aberrant evolution proved that whenever this taint grew in an Aberrant, the being became incomprehensibly evil. Aberrants took over organized crime, infiltrated military systems and manipulated religious cults — not to mention indulged in numerous indiscriminate acts of destruction and cruelty.

The Aberrant War

Our initial attempts to corral the Aberrants largely failed. Their powers allowed many to elude even the OMEN satellite system, and enabled Aberrants to stage shows of strength, to attack victims and to perform atrocities only to disappear again.

It's erroneous to think of Aberrants as a single, unified group, even today (although their attacks seem to be growing larger, better organized and more strategic since the reappearance of "The Colony" in 2119). Decades ago, Aberrants were a diverse minority, separated from one another by geographical location, social upbringing, religious philosophy and individual temperament. While numbers of them banded together, Aberrants were for the most part unified in only one thing: their devastating powers.

Furthermore, at that time they had not developed the massive physical mutations that mark Aberrants today. They were virtually impossible to find unless they called attention to

themselves. Others were so powerful that they stood in plain sight and dared humans to challenge them.

One of the most notable was, of course, "Allah's Legion" — an Aberrant-controlled religious group — which seized control of the African island Bahrain in 2046. Whether the group's leader, Abdul Masiq, truly believed in the group's religious tenets or simply used zealous Aberrants to further his own agenda matters little. The group's actions motivated governments and corporations to organize defenses and plan unified retaliations against Aberrants.

While it certainly seems amazing today that humanity (and the Æon Trinity) waited so long to address the Aberrant peril, remember that mankind was dealing with previously unknown circumstances. It took some time for our grandparents to understand the situation's severity, to realize we weren't even dealing with a human threat.

The atrocities escalated until the United Nations finally declared war on the Aberrant population in 2049. It's difficult to understand what it was like to live in that era. While we can intellectually comprehend the travesties of war and man's inhumanity to man, how do we account for the sheer viciousness and randomness of some attacks? What was the point of attacking commercial airlines — acts that destroyed intercontinental air travel for decades? What did the Aberrant clan known as "the Outsiders" gain by dumping *l.-ribopropylmethionine* (RPM) into remote water supplies all across the globe, slowly dissolving the nervous systems of peasants and nomads far from any medical care? And was Wycoff's self-immolation and subsequent spread of the blight a result of him losing control of his powers, or some degenerate desire to leave his mark on the North American plains?

Similarly, we may never understand why an unnamed Aberrant raised a tidal wave that virtually destroyed the Florida coast. Or why Geslav rendered 90% of the Russian nuclear reactors inert yet left the region's warheads armed. And even though the self-proclaimed "Space Brigade's" surprise takeover of Olympus in 2049 made excellent tactical sense — giving Aberrants control of near orbit — the strange group seemed content to stay on Luna and simply observe the conflict on Earth.

Almost as tragic as the loss of millions of lives in those 12 years was the massive information loss. Satellites, transmitters, computer networks, even printing presses fell victim to Aberrant (and human) attacks. We may never truly know of the worst, most horrible acts perpetrated

The Destruction of the Information Superhighway

— Dr. Kieran Baxter, *The Technological Age* © 2110 Walkabout Press

By the first decade of the 21st century, the so-called "Internet" had evolved into a complex and highly interactive optical network. The "OpNet" was a global communications web considered invulnerable to power fluctuations, electromagnetic pulses and other technological nightmares. Aside from its protective capacity, an optical network increased the information flow by orders of magnitude compared to that of the copper wiring used previously. It was a time of incredible liberation and exchange among global cultures.

Then, in 2061, one man flooded the entire OpNet with the prosaically termed "electro-optical pulse." Mungu Kuwasha used his Aberrant powers to transmit data-destroying energy through the optical lines supposed to resist just such assaults. He literally hopped his pulse through the OpNet and directly into millions of computer systems, not only wiping clean average household computers, but even the most heavily protected government and corporate networks.

A single Aberrant's maliciousness cast information technologies from near-instantaneous communications between almost everywhere on Earth and in orbit back to the isolated computer systems that are still in operation today. Decades' worth of historical, technological, scientific and cultural information was erased in an instant. Even half a century later, millions of information technicians have been able to recover only a fraction of the lost data. Communications technologies were literally thrown back a century.

And why did the Aberrant do it? He simply wondered what would happen.

Fortunately, the Æon Trinity has proven instrumental in restoring many histories and archives that were lost with the OpNet. The Trinity's 200-year legacy of observing and recording events has proved instrumental to our understanding of the past.

Wycoff Explosion > GN News Archive 2054

NEPTUNE ARCHIVE

Subject: Project Rewrite
From: Trinity Council
To: All North American and European Outposts
Encryption: DSE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 8.12.2062

With the destruction of the OpNet, you are authorized to commandeer all book and database libraries within your jurisdictions, whether public or private. Books, information and data are to be shipped to regional distribution centers for transport to Æon holding facilities. Gathered information will be compiled and preserved, to be posted selectively if or when the OpNet is restored.

in this time. Still, from a perspective almost three-quarters of a century later, we at least have a sense of the overall dynamics and impact of events.

The Ultimatum and the Exodus

While the rest of the world fought the Aberrants, China went comparatively unscathed. Its only participation in the war was to deny known Aberrants entry into the country. What China did behind the scenes to avoid Aberrant attacks is still unknown.

Although the action seemed incomprehensible at the time — with so much of the world in danger of Aberrant attack — China devoted tremendous resources to developing space technologies. In 2053, China launched the *Xingyang Sujia*, the first interplanetary craft with a human crew, headed for Mars. China continued to set the standard for space development despite the United States' and Russia's attempts to catch up. By 2061, China had several hundred orbital craft, three orbital stations and seven huge (at that time) cruisers in space.

Then, upon the destruction of the OpNet, China put the Aberrant War to an end. In 2061, with more than 500 craft in orbit around the Earth and Luna — all armed with

fusion warheads — China announced that it would launch a full-scale nuclear strike if the Aberrants did not cease their attacks immediately. China had even established what was then known as a "deadman switch": The strike would take place automatically if periodic signals were not sent to stop it.

It appeared then (and to this day) that China was perfectly willing to sacrifice the entire planet to end the war. The nation's leaders apparently didn't care how it was resolved; Aberrants could surrender, face execution or even colonize and stay on Luna — China's proudest and most brilliant would be safe aboard the fleet. As we know, the Aberrants spurned the options offered them. Instead, they left the solar system entirely. But even in that they didn't go quietly; it took a foolhardy Aberrant to trigger a retaliatory strike on Bahrain to prove that China meant business.

To this day, we don't know where the Aberrants went after the Ultimatum. It is assumed that the majority followed those Aberrants with a "warping" ability to small bases established previously on distant planets. While we may never know the Aberrants' final destination, we shall never forget the declaration from the unimaginably powerful Divis Mal, just prior to the Exodus. The being's appearance in the relocated United Nations was met with surprise and panic. The Aberrant posed for the cameras to give its final statement to the people of Earth: "Your legacy is our future." The words resonate with rage and revenge even today. With Divis Mal's declaration, the Aberrant War finally came to an end.

In the aftermath of these dramatic days, after 12 years of brutal conflict, one question remained: Why did China order its fleet to stand down after the Aberrants departed? China was in a position to control Earth and all of near space, but chose not to proceed. How many nations over the course of history would have done the same thing? What reasons did the Chinese government have to release us from its iron grip?

The Crash

The Aberrant War's incredible toll was more than emotional or physical. The resources of entire regions were depleted, as demonstrated by the loss of much of the former United States' agricultural regions, urban centers and financial wealth. Electronic networks were destroyed beyond repair. Information technologies were isolated and fragmented, and protected fiercely as a result.

— Radio communication pirated from OMEN Low-Earth-Orbit Relay Station 2, Eau Claire, WI, 9.7.2061.

OMEN LEO Relay 2: ...seem to be holding position. Sir, if the Chinese were going to do something, wouldn't they have done it by now?

NORAD: You're not paid for commentary, Relay 2. Just keep your sensors on that—

OMEN LEO Relay 2: I'm picking up a spatial disturbance — it's approximately 500 meters off one of the Chinese fusion platforms! Redirecting orbital cameras....

NORAD: What do you see, Relay 2? Are they activating something?

OMEN LEO Relay 2: Visual should be online in a few seconds. The spatial reading has stabilized. Visuals directed toward target...now. Holy shit! There's someone outside the platform! It looks like he's wearing some sort of...armor. No! It's an Aberrant!

NORAD: Repeat last transmission. Repeat.

OMEN LEO Relay 2: He's tearing into the platform's hull with his bare hands!

NORAD: Alert: all OMEN relay stations. Do a long-range sweep for spatial disturbances.

OMEN LEO Relay 2: Sir! I have a comm blackout to all OMEN satellites in LEO Alpha Prime! That's four satellites offline!

NORAD: Relays 1 and 4 report an EMP in LEO Alpha Prime, Relay 2. Looks like the Chinese lit up a platform.

OMEN LEO Relay 2: Oh, God!

NORAD: Keep it together, Relay 2. Everyone keep it together. The Chinese have the ball. Let's hope they decide to keep playing.

The Ultimatum Broadcast

— GN, 9.7.2061

We have just received confirmation that the Aberrant-controlled island-nation of Bahrain has been destroyed by a calculated nuclear strike. The attack came from a Chinese orbital craft, armed with an estimated six fusion warheads. Details are still unclear at this time, but it does appear that the entire island has been destroyed.

We expect a response from Chinese officials within the hour. In the interim, they have released a preliminary statement. It claims the Bahrain strike was in retaliation for an Aberrant attack on a Chinese orbital platform. Further signs of aggression from Aberrant or human forces will supposedly be met with a full-scale nuclear attack on the entire planet!

I'd like to take a moment to appeal to all Aberrants and government forces watching this broadcast. It seems the Chinese government is fully committed to its ultimatum. I urge you, please find a peaceful resolution. Humanity's fate rests in your hands.

Three additional pressures — the Urban Schism, the Communication Frequency Constriction (or Comm Crunch), and the Orbital Expansion — also weighed on human society.

The Urban Schism

In the wake of the Aberrant War, survivors clustered in groups to create communities. They did so in part for safety in numbers, but also to gather strength to take the territories and resources of other survivors. This phenomenon occurred on a small scale as bandit gangs fought over ravaged turf, and on an international level as shattered countries squabbled over scraps of land.

The "Urban Schism" arose because of a division between the wealthy and poor that existed even before the world economy collapsed. Once it became possible for individuals and groups to own hyper-fusion energy sources — and these groups could remove themselves from the remains of society — the Schism progressed rapidly.

While it swept the globe to varying degrees, the Urban Schism occurred primarily in the Western Hemisphere. Groups moved out of North American and European cities and into remote areas, and eventually into orbit as land became prohibitively expensive. Australia was also an important influence on this mass emigration. The oft-forgotten continent reversed its previous isolationist policies and encouraged the dispossessed and destitute to start a new life "down under." The campaign worked marvelously. Australia's population swelled to twice its previous size in less than five years. Relocation to the Outback enclaves, as *all* middle-class communities have since become known, only slowed when other nations pursued intrasolar colonization (and Australia's own resources became noticeably strained).

The shift in populace changed the very society of the world's cities. The wealthy created energized arcologies. The poor, forgotten at the feet of the rich, eked out an existence as servants and maintained the metroplexes. Those unfortunate souls without the talent or luck for even that minimal level of subsistence scrabbled for survival in the husks of the once-thriving cities.

These social disparities exist even today, intensified by 60 years of cultural stratification. No single social class gives much thought to the others anymore, except as potential threats to its own safety.

Microgravity

— Excerpt: *Let's Explore Space!* interactive holo
© 2099
Alpha Software

36. Where would you find zero-gravity?
a. In space
b. In a vacuum chamber
c. Nowhere
d. Answers "a" and "b"

Correct answer: "c." Since each object in the universe has at least some mass, everything exerts gravitational force to some degree, however slight. As a result, there is no true "zero-gravity."

The extremely weak gravity found on a space craft or other small extraterrestrial object is properly called "microgravity." However, the term "zero-g" is often used instead, and only the most particular individual is disturbed by its substitution.

Transmissions in the 22nd Century

— Cori Heisler, *The Painful Truth*
© 2119 MMI

Since "air lines," those transmissions that don't travel via an optical cable or other physical conduit, are heavily taxed and monitored. an unregistered broadcast is bound to catch a government's attention — and feel its wrath. Of course, this doesn't stop people from transmitting, whether via technological device or psi talent, without a license.

Doing so puts the offender at risk. Unauthorized transmissions can incur thousands of yuan in fines. More severe laws demand jail sentences of months or even years. Governments don't take kindly to those who poach one of their richest revenue sources.

The Comm Crunch

With the loss of the OpNet as a means of unlimited, instantaneous communication, the world was forced to resort to old-style transmitted communication systems. Human society went from free information exchange to limited transmission bands and jealously guarded secrets. Communications technologies eventually reached a hard limit; there just weren't enough radio frequencies to be had (or so governments claimed). Signal splitting and duplex amplifications could do only so much, and the proliferation of cellular phones and other link-users were in danger of overwhelming communications systems altogether.

Governments therefore imposed hard regulations and heavy taxes on cellular links, creating a reliable source of revenue for the financially strapped bureaucracies. (Even today, patching a call from Sao Paulo to Olympus costs a small fortune, and that's only if the frequency link can be rented.) These limitations also went a long way toward insuring that governments and the affluent maintained access to and controlled communications, while the rest of the population did without.

Today, people go uninformed beyond what those in control of communication systems choose to broadcast. Limitations on communications capabilities put transmitting on a 20th-century level. People also live in a state of fear lest too many systems be linked together and provide an opportunity for data and systems to be destroyed again. Access to the somewhat restored OpNet is limited even at the university and government levels. Only the media claves link through multiple networks, and even their transmissions are timed and monitored rigidly.

Orbital Expansion

The most progressive movement in the wake of the Aberrant War was humanity's widespread departure from Earth. The development of gravcrystals in 2071 made it feasible for normal people to live and work in space.

Previously, small stations had to rely on short-shift rotations, and woe to the worker who stayed too long! Fully automated stations also proved ineffective without human intervention.

Once microgravity environments became safe for humans, companies started recruiting people to go off-planet. Considering the price of land on Earth at that time, not to mention the devastation of the European, Middle Eastern and North American landscapes, it's easy to understand how this lifestyle was tempting. Individuals bought into a colony or research organization and were

Holograms

— Dr. Kieran Baxter, *The Technological Age*
© 2110 Walkabout Press

Holograms project visible three-dimensional images, without the need for a screen. Computers and most forms of entertainment use holograms as a standard output format. Projecting a hologram that is indistinguishable from reality, or that has frequencies outside of visible light, is highly illegal. All holoprojectors are incapable of breaking these laws without skilled modification.

Simulated reality games, also called "holosims" or "sims," use holograms extensively. Licensed game arcades are permitted to use reality-grade projectors.

Most authorities have goggles that can screen out most standard hologram projection frequencies.

Scientists Say: We Have The Answer

— Newsday holobrief © 8.12.2103 GN

INDIA — Noetic scientists from the Chitra Bhanu Psi Institute announced today the discovery of a previously unknown energy form. Scientists studying psi-active individuals and the supposed use of mental powers believe that psionic abilities function on a subatomic level by manipulating an as-yet-unidentified energy particle. Research suggests that these particles operate like quantum energy, although at an even more minute level. Previous theories state that the quantum level of energy contains the smallest particles known to science.

Psi-active subjects report sensing these particles, and being able to manipulate them. As Chitra Bhanu Meena Patel, member of the quanta-kinetic order states, "Ever since I was triggered, I've been able to see things in a new way. Not see, really, but...know. I'm not just in a room; I'm surrounded by energy that moves and shifts as objects and people do. When something breaks, the energy in it flows outward. When something is created, energy flows in. Sometimes the change is so quick, it's stunning. I sometimes wonder how I would feel if a really big change occurred near me."

Tests continue to understand and quantify the energy form that psion-ically aware individuals appear to tap into. The optimistic among the research team hope that their work will offer insights into questions that still plague science, even in the 22nd century.

shipped to the colonies where their new jobs and homes waited. Once colonies had sufficient populations, they were more or less self-sustaining, especially once their function — manufacturing, mining or research — got underway.

Attention diverted across the globe to the colonization of space was the catalyst for resolving wars and strife on Earth. Former squabbles and earthly interests seemed petty to nations capable of venturing into space for territory, resources, wealth and trade — commodities that wouldn't have to be fought for in the vastness of unclaimed space. Even small or unstable countries were able to join the space movement as they made alliances rather than declared wars, and joined their neighbors on orbital and deep-space ventures.

The development of pseudo-gravity marked a new direction for humanity after the devastation of the Aberrant War.

The Aberrant Return and the Rise of Psions

There is no way to describe the collective dismay, horror and terror felt when the Aberrants returned in 2104. Most assumed that the Aberrants wouldn't come back for several generations, if ever. Many hoped that Divis Mal's threat was empty. Yet less than 50 years after their Exodus, the Aberrants are back.

There is hope, though. Many people grudgingly admit that, as odd as the psions can seem, they have proven to be our best hope in this time of need, and the Æon Trinity has stood beside them since their emergence. Indeed, the Æon Trinity was there to support the orders and their proxies when they first appeared. Æon recognized the instrumental place that the orders had in humanity's survival, and worked with the proxies to find them a home among the world's peoples.

The Legion was the first order to reveal itself to the world in the Aberrant altercation at the Sydney spaceport. The Legionnaires have since proven to be stalwart warriors, but certainly not the only ones. Orgotek uses electrokinesis to explore the noetic science of biotechnology, supplying Gifted and even normal humans with bioware, from weapons to ships to even computers. The Æsculapian "rexs" are always on hand to aid the injured and destitute. Their tremendous healing powers are a godsend in these desperate times. And

CONFIDENTIAL

— Excerpt: audiofile; voice unidentified — 7.17.2119

I have to admit to some curiosity, though. Could our early members have somehow been responsible for creating the proxies? Could previous Trinity members inspire so much hope for an era of human enlightenment that what the proxies have quietly referred to as their "benefactors" came to investigate?

The proxies claim (and I wonder why we believe them) that they're helping us fight the Aberrants. But there seems to be evidence of the proxies' appearance and the Aberrants' return at the same time. And, of course, the larger issue: Just what is this "taint" that pushed the Aberrants over the edge years ago, and does it continue to affect humanity — or even the psions?

"Legion Triumphant" > Mural Sydney Spaceport Lobby

CONFIDENTIAL

— Excerpt: audiofile; voice unidentified — 5.12.2106

In order for the orders to be integrated, we must sculpt an image for them based on society's needs, whether conscious or subconscious. The psions have to be perceived as everything the Aberrants are not. We need to work against that foil. The orders also have to prove their dedication — some great sacrifice, something at their own expense for the good of others. But if we're going to accomplish any of our goals, the orders have to present a unified whole. If they don't appear to be united, why would anyone follow them?

of all the things that the clairsentients of ISRA can perceive, it is perhaps the very approach and proximity of Aberrants themselves that makes these psions indispensable.

The psions' dedication to protect humanity from Aberrant assault wins them favor among humans, even among the skeptical. The psions' possession of powers seemingly like those of the Aberrants of old creates concern that a new destroyer walks the Earth. How long will it be before these psions turn on those whom they profess to defend? Valid fears, but ones that have been assuaged as the Gifted have integrated themselves among human friends, societies and countries, and have been relentless in their commitment to protect humanity over the past 16 years.

Yet despite all psion efforts, the most significant and tragic event to occur in recent history was the crash of the orbital station *Esperanza* in late 2114. Psions of the electrokinetic Orgotek Order explained that they had intercepted some kind of Aberrant transmission, that an attack was imminent on the European Commonwealth's shining achievement since the war: its very own space habitat in Earth orbit. Sadly, the psions' effort could not save the station.

During the Aberrant attack, the *Esperanza* was knocked from its relatively stable L1 Lagrange point. Even the station's advanced sta-

Career Day

— Jemma Kerlious, Grade 11, Maya Anjelou High School, San Francisco Arcology

I wonder if I might ask a few questions about the *Esperanza*?

What we know seems so vague, even after this long. Ever since the Legion won against the Aberrants at Sydney, other orders have appeared publicly. But how did the electrokinetics know the *Esperanza* attack was going to happen? Orgotek claims it heard an Aberrant transmission, but that seems awfully simple.

I have to think there must have been some kind of advance warning. But if that's so, from who? ISRA? The Ministry? Why didn't they get more help to stop the attack? The other thing is to say that Orgotek is related to Aberrants, but that's ridiculous. The electrokinetics have proven just as brave as the Legionnaires. Personally, I think they developed some kind of bioapp that let them tap into Aberrant communications. Don't suppose you could support that...?

And why did the Upeo wa Macho disappear? Why the *whole* order? Where did the teleporters go? Are they alive? How come they haven't come back?

bilizing thrusters weren't enough to keep it from tumbling toward Earth. Gravitational and re-entry stresses and the attack itself tore the *Esperanza* apart; it fell in pieces over the Atlantic and crashed to Earth over much of France and parts of Spain, as well as over various parts of Western Europe. Millions were killed instantly, and France remains a largely uninhabitable wasteland even after five years.

In the wake of the tragedy, it was discovered that all members of one of the orders, the Upeo wa Macho, had disappeared. Their departure remains unexplained to this day. This loss also had immeasurable impact. The teleporting psions had become humanity's means to deep space. Their efforts allowed colonies and stations to be established far from Earth, much farther than could be traveled by conventional means in any reasonable time frame. When the Upeo disappeared, so too did humanity's connection to its colonies.

It has been suggested that the Aberrant attack on the *Esperanza* was a decoy for the abduction of the teleporters. No one knows for certain.

But even when handed a major setback like the loss of the *Esperanza* — and the European community's hope to reestablish itself in the galactic sphere — humans prove remarkably resourceful and ingenious. Æon Trinity and several orders, with assistance from various world governments and even the stranded Qin, have spent the past five years modifying teleportation biotech and de-

ESPERANZA CRASH >>> ORGOTEK ARCHIVE

· NEPTUNE ARCHIVE ·

REPERCUSSIONS OF THE *ESPERANZA* CRASH AND UPEO WA MACHO DISAPPEARANCE

Æon Trinity Debriefing, Neptune Division

Subject: Ministry agent Chen Li

I was a recent graduate of Shanghai when the space station crashed and the teleporters disappeared. If you are aware of how our powers work, you understand that our senses of our surroundings have limits. I am normally able to sense strong changes in psionic energy within a few kilometers. That is all.

When the *Esperanza* crashed and the Upeo disappeared, even I felt something — half a world away! The deaths of so many people affected every psion at that time. A wave came over me, a terrible feeling of dread. I reported to duty immediately and found that I wasn't the only one — we all felt it, some more than I. My nose and ears bled for days. I knew some who went into comas!

They say that having these powers is a blessing. I am pleased to serve my country and my people, but there is a price to pay. Being in touch with the movement of things, with changes in energy — with life and death — can be...overwhelming. It is not always a pleasant world.

veloping new bioware to interact with it. The resulting new "jump ships" started testing last year (and resulted in an accidental encounter with yet another alien race).

While less than two dozen of the ships are currently online and have undergone minimum testing, the orders say they are prepared to stage exploratory missions to the extrasolar colonies. It may be weeks or even months before we find out how our orphaned colonies have fared; the jump ships seem so primitive compared to the capabilities of the Upeo.

Alien Contact

Perhaps by coincidence or due to some cosmic design, just as humanity struggled to comprehend the return of the Aberrants and the emergence of the psions, we made first contact with an alien race — the Qin — in 2107. The aliens were received with both fear and joy. Thus far, relations have proven friendly; in fact, both races have established embassies on each other's worlds. Unfortunately no one, not even the Qin, could have anticipated the loss of communication with our respective embassies when the Upeo wa Macho, who made first contact possible, disappeared. We must be confident that our joint expedition back to the Qin homeworld, Qinshui, will be successful in re-establishing contact. We can only hope the Qin will understand that the abrupt termination of relations was due to the Aberrants, our mutual enemy, and not an indication of disrespect on our part.

Initial contact with the Chromatics was not cordial. We weren't even aware of their existence until they attacked the Karroo interstellar mining colony in 2113. Reasons for the attack are unknown, and will remain so until jump-ship missions are staged to the mining colony; nothing has been heard of the Chromatics since the Upeo disappeared. Pre-

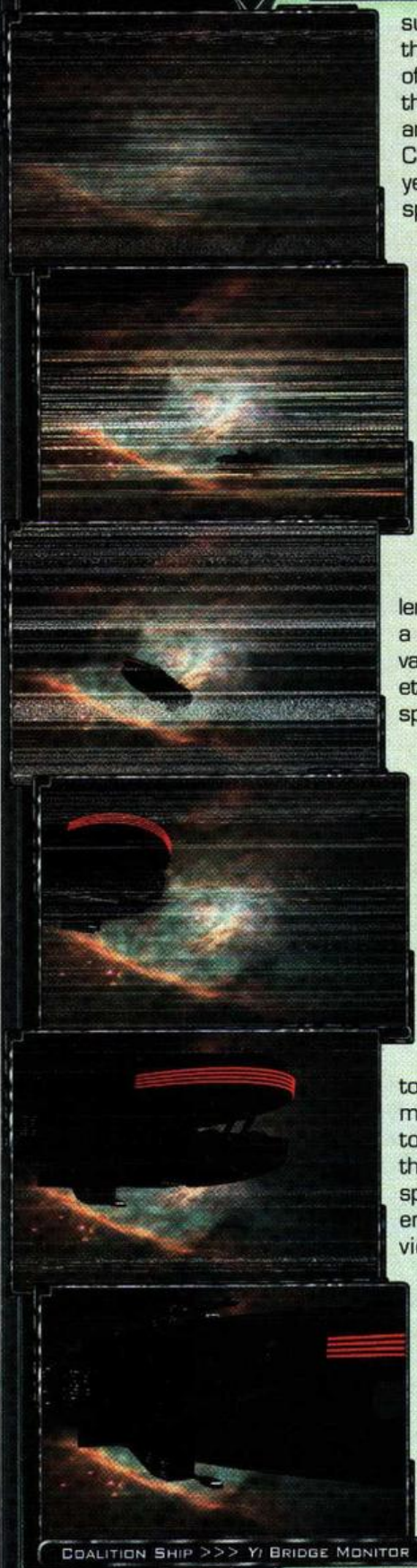
Psions: Messiahs or Menace?

— Carlos Viminez, *Journal* © 2112 MMI

Disaster has not spared the psi orders. When the orders were founded, there were eight. Chitra Bhanu, the so-called "quantakinetic order," was said to have been particularly effective at searching out Aberrants, but its members reportedly fell victim to Aberrant Syndrome — the taint.

Psion representatives claim that Chitra Bhanu sensitivity to Aberrants made them vulnerable to the same derangement that afflicted Aberrants in the early 21st century. We understand that the other orders — acting on direction from the proxies — eliminated all Chitra Bhanu psions. We have also been assured that spread of Aberrant Syndrome to other psions is impossible.

Of course, these assurances are only valid until more psions are infected by the taint. After the Aberrant attack on Sydney, during which the orders made their first appearance, we were told that psions were not Aberrants, not mutants, but humanity's ally. Yet here we are six years later and one order short. Who knows what might be next?



Coalition Ship >>> Yi Bridge Monitor

sumably that silence implies that the aliens lack interstellar travel of their own, and that we will have the upper hand when our ships are fully online. But how have the Chromatics spent the past five years on the fringe of our known space?

Humanity's most recent alien contact has come as a result of initial experiments with the new jump ships. Details of first contact are virtually unknown, except that something went horribly wrong. Reports thus far have involved the names "Coalition," and, apparently in a derogatory fashion, "Breeders."

The 22nd Century

Humans face a variety of challenges today. No longer confined to a single planet, we now dwell in a variety of places and under a variety of conditions. Humans have spread throughout near space, starting lives on Luna, Mars, Jupiter's moons, in the asteroid belt, and in a handful of deep-space colonies. We have also unleashed the power of the mind and explore true human potential through the psions. Knowledge discovered by the psi orders is used for *human* purposes, to comprehend our place in the order of the universe.

It was stated previously that humanity has a tendency to repeat its mistakes. But humans have another trait: We pull together. We join forces when threatened by outside forces. In spite of the problems and differences we face, we can take a long view and consider the consequences of our actions. Now is the time to gather our resources and prepare for the future as an entire race — unified — not merely as single nations, corporations, groups and individuals. Now more than ever, our goal is the unity of all.

Hope, Sacrifice, Unity
Æon Trinity

Hope for the Future

— Kara McGowan, interviewed for *Retrospective* © 2120 OBC

I was what, seven, eight, when the Sydney raid happened? I was absolutely determined to grow up and become a psion. Why my sibs didn't destroy that holofile, I'll never know. I played it over and over.

I still go to the Legion recruitment center every year. I've registered neutral every time, but they say that even the lowest neutral can suddenly show latency.

It'll happen someday. I know it. When it does, I want to be one of the first to go back to the lost colonies. I want to hunt down Aberrants. I want to stand up to Divis Mal, and wipe that holovid smirk off The Colony's face. I want to take the Qin back to their home, and find out why the Chromatics attacked us so long ago. I want to do it all!

200-Year Timeline

1921 — First public incidents of super-normal acts. Events continue sporadically over the next few decades, but their influence on culture and politics is minimal.

1923 — Maxwell Anderson Mercer establishes the Æon Society for Gentlemen.

1970 — A dramatic increase in super-normal events. Normal human society is amazed by the achievements and aghast at the actions of unusual individuals.

1998 — So-called "Aberrants" appear in a variety of places and demonstrate powers that can be used for the good of humanity.

2021 — Aberrants proliferate globally. Their activities, struggles and depredations increasingly endanger and harm normal humans.

2022 — Dr. Soguk Birlesme invents viable hyper-fusion.

2024 — The United States unveils a versatile, fusion-powered orbital craft.

2024 to 2032 — Various nations launch orbital defense satellites. By far, the most advanced is the United States' Orbital Military Network (OMEN) defense system. It is used increasingly to monitor and, when necessary, counteract intensifying Aberrant activities.

2031 — The United States establishes the Olympus Lunar base.

2046 — The Aberrant group Allah's Legion seizes control of the African island Bahrain. The event initiates widespread conflict between humans and Aberrants.

2049 — The United Nations declares war on Aberrants.

2049 — Aberrants calling themselves the Space Brigade take over Olympus Base. This group destroys 75% of OMEN satellites. Olympus remains under their control until the war ends.

2049 to 2061 — Various major cities (mostly in North America and Europe) suffer destruction at Aberrant hands.

2052 — Aberrants destroy Jerusalem. Reconstuction delayed until 2061 due to ongoing Aberrant conflict.

2053 — China launches *Xingyang Sujia*, the first manned interplanetary exploration craft. Its destination: Mars.

2054 — Aberrant Calvert Wycoff explodes over the North American Great Plains in a flaming ball of plasma. The detonation is blamed for the devastating blight that follows, which destroys North America's grain belt.

2055 — The United States invades Canada (with Quebec's assistance). Ostensibly, this is done to claim Canada's marginally healthier farmlands, but it boils down to U.S. need for Canada's resources (geographic and financial) in the ongoing war.

2061 — The Aberrant Mungu "Backlash" Kuwasha destroys the OpNet, setting back communications technology 100 years.

2061 — China makes its "Earth Strike Ultimatum." Aberrants leave Earth with the threat of returning. The war ends. The Chinese fleet stands down.

2061 to 2070 — The Crash. Millions are dead. Half of the world's arable lands are infertile. The world's financial and ecological resources are drained. The world economy collapses. Conflict erupts between nations. The Comm Crunch hits. The Urban Schism occurs. Orbital expansion is attempted to revitalize the world.

2067 — At Nippon's suggestion, China reconfigures its economy on a platinum standard. Other nations follow. This is a significant step toward revitalizing the world economy. International commerce changes from a dollar to a yuan base.

2071 — The "pseudo-graviton" is developed; gravcrystal grids make artificial gravity possible on spacecraft and in other microgravity environments. The discovery heralds an end to global strife; warfare diminishes and nations become culturally and technologically progressive.

2103 — Eight humans are bestowed with psionic powers, making them proxies for the psi orders that they are to create. The proxies learn about the force behind the soon-to-return Aberrants, and about the true nature of the taint.

2104 — Aberrants attack intrasolar colonies.

2106 — The psychokinetic order reveals the existence of psions when members fight off Aberrants in Sydney. The orders and psions are met with mixed feelings. The orders begin extensive public-relations programs.

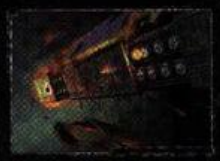
2106 to 2120 — The psi orders integrate themselves into human society and assist or become involved in the development of technology, commerce, travel, exploration, medicine and even entertainment.

2107 — First contact with the Qin. A Chinese deep-space explorer (psi-jumped) encounters an alien patrol craft in the Qin's home system. Though initial interactions are cautions, things go well.

2108 — The Qin establish an embassy on Luna. Humans establish one on Qinshui, the Qin homeworld.

2109 — The proxies declare the quantakinetic order to be in league with Aberrants. The other psions unite and destroy the rogue order.

2113 — First contact with the Chromatics; the aliens stage a raid on an African mining colony.



2114 — Aberrants attack the *Esperanza* orbital station. An electrokinetic strike team reacts immediately. The psions are unable to prevent the station from crashing to Earth, destroying France. Afterward, the teleporters are discovered to have vanished.

2119 — The orders create viable biotech jump ships that interface with clairsentients. These should make interstellar travel possible without the Upeo wa Macho.

First contact occurs with the Coalition after one of the first test jumps of the new ships. Details are sketchy, but the event apparently doesn't go well.

2120 — Present time. Expeditions are about to be sent to the interstellar colonies and to contact the Chromatics and Coalition. Deep-space probes continue to search for Aberrants.

22ND-CENTURY EARTH

The dawn of psionic capacity and the birth of noetic science are the greatest human events of the 22nd century. Psions, the living embodiments of psionic energy, bear the honor and burden of leading humanity into a new age of understanding.

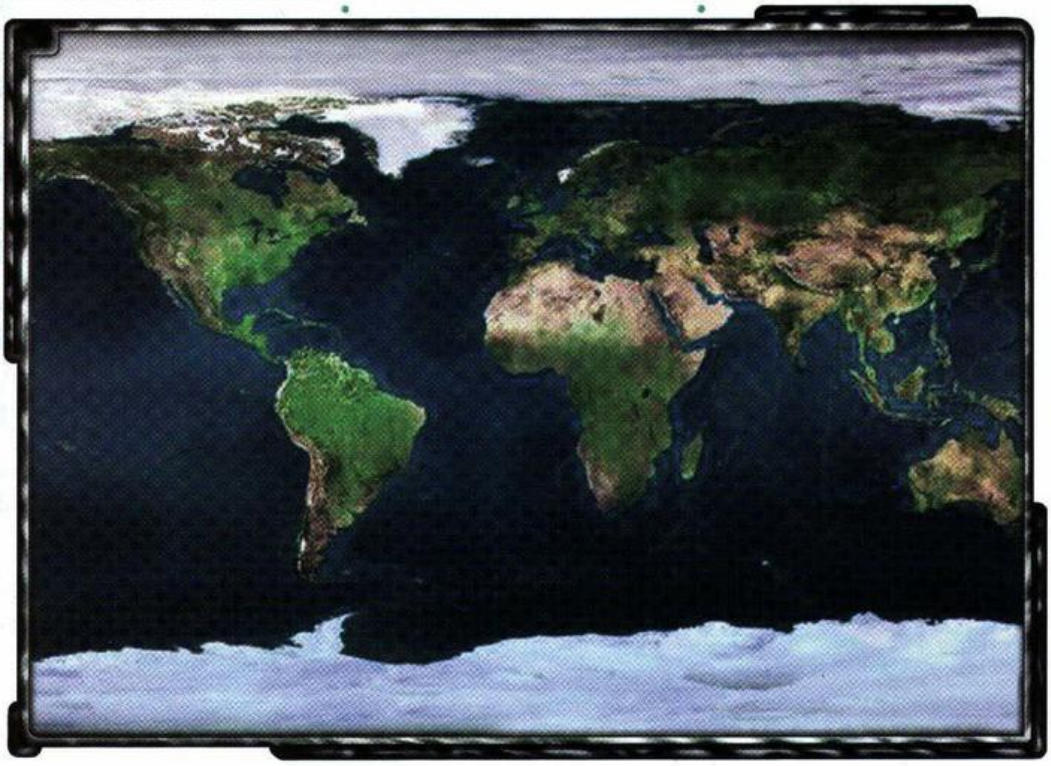
The secrets of the universe are at our fingertips. All we need to do to grasp them is understand psionic energy. This is why psions are so important. Even Aberrants and hostile alien races, while deadly menaces to humans, are insignificant compared to the universe itself. By understanding all Creation, we understand even our enemies. And then, are they truly enemies at all?

Our Tragic Flaw

Despite the fact that humanity stands on the brink of discovering absolute truths, that psions wield the most important elemental force in the universe, normal humans have yet to understand the big picture. Humanity in the 22nd century has, as throughout history, an amazing tendency to create divisions, to segment itself with artificial boundaries. We define ourselves by religion, cultural heritage and national boundaries. We split over differences that we can control, such as affiliations, academic standing, gender preferences and even employers. But we also create groups based on differences beyond our control, such as skin color and place of birth.

Yet in spite of cultural differences and long-standing political conflicts, humans still unite against external threats. Old conflicts are set aside; disagreements are tabled until the outsider is vanquished. Aberrants are the ultimate "them," the epitomé of everything that is not human. In the face of the Aberrant threat, humanity's ability to set its own differences aside may be the one thing that can save the Earth. Although Aberrant raids began erratically, the beings seem to be organizing, hitting strategic targets, and striking in ever-increasing force. If humanity and the psions cannot pull together, we may not survive this twisted Second Coming.

All nations, corporations, industries, orders and individuals in the human race therefore have something in common. Despite their differences, they all must confront their own destruction and find the common ground to face it together. Distant and disparate societies in the 22nd century thus become one society: that of frail but resolute humanity. Perhaps once we realize this unity, we can transcend artificial boundaries.



22nd-Century Warfare
— Gregor Muros, *World at War*
© 2118 Walkabout Press

With the progression of technology and society, warfare has come full circle. Centuries ago, conflict involved a handful of combatants on either side, slugging it out up close and personal. With technological innovations and growing populations came larger wars involving bigger weapons of mass destruction. Then the Aberrant War showed humanity how much it had come to rely on bombs and missiles. Since conflict was against small groups of isolated Aberrants, using large-scale weaponry caused more destruction and damage to the side using it than to the intended target.

That conflict and the resulting Crash impressed strongly upon 22nd-century society the value of natural resources and even of man-made developments on Earth and in space. Mankind couldn't afford to allow rampant destruction while defending or attacking locales, especially given all the money and manpower spent building them up in the first place.

As a result, most warfare is again on a personal level, involving a squad composed of a dozen soldiers or at most a battalion of a few hundred. Heavy artillery, missile strikes and the like are held in reserve, used only if absolutely necessary. It's the same whether the conflict is between a Canadian resistance squad and FSM troops, or between a psion team and Aberrants. A small sampling of courageous men and women armed with personal weaponry decide the fate of thousands, even millions.

The Æon Trinity

Æon is one of the most influential organizations in the world, even if not the largest or most visible. Its primary goal is to chart the course of humanity's future, to ensure that humans achieve their full potential. The Æon Trinity has therefore worked with the orders and psions since their emergence, to ensure that the fundamental energy, psi, is used to raise humanity to its rightful place in the cosmos.

These are lofty, ephemeral goals, but ones that Æon pursues on a real-world, realistic level. The organization's leaders remain fixed on the achievements they pursue, and follow their vision at every turn. Meanwhile, their underlings, even down to the "lowest" clerk, facilitate the leaders' needs and orders, no matter how clear-cut or how enigmatic.

The Æon Trinity is led by the Æon Council, which consists of the three leaders of Æon's branches, Neptune (administrative), Triton (research and development) and Proteus (operations). These directors work together to preserve the vision that Maxwell Mercer, founder of Æon, had 200 years ago, and work to ensure that humanity fulfills its destiny.

Beneath these figures are thousands of administrators and regional directors who oversee the Trinity's day-to-day operations. Æon is comprised of hundreds of thousands of agents who are each assigned to one of the three divisions. The three branches have a place wherever the Trinity is located, for no one part can function fully without the others. Proteus cannot stage missions without the orders of Neptune, but neither Neptune nor Proteus can act without the intelligence of Triton, while Triton must rely on the other two divisions for support when investigating.

Æon has headquarters and outposts scattered across the world and throughout known space. Such offices and facilities aren't obvious; they draw no more attention than simple businesses do. Yet these are the places where normal people and psions work together to coordinate services and to defend humanity and the Earth itself, even if only in the regional jurisdiction of a single office.

A regional Trinity branch administers to the sick and homeless, operates support and education programs, provides economic aid to the destitute, provides backup to

police and military forces, performs medical research, investigates potential weaknesses in Aberrants, searches for signs of Aberrant Syndrome, coordinates psion efforts, maintains relations between the psion orders, investigates the mysteries of the subquantum universe, and, most recently, coordinates the orders' manufacture and launch of interstellar jump ships. The Trinity enacts humanitarian programs across the spectrum of society.

To the normal civilian, "Æon Trinity" is an everyday term, but one that is little understood. Most people consider it a goodwill and human-aid organization that has existed longer than anyone can remember. Æon simply *is*, and does good work like any other social agency is supposed to.

The majority of Æon office and outpost members are normal humans, but psions represent a significant minority. Psion attendants are either assigned to support the Trinity by their respective orders, or belong to no particular order and offer their services to Æon as a whole.

In return, psions can call upon the services of an Æon outpost anywhere on Earth or Luna, or in space. Psions receive room and board. They can seek medical aid, requisition information or transportation, and establish communications with the Trinity, their orders or any other human organization. They also use Æon outposts to meet with other psions and to stage operations. Psions even use Trinity facilities to establish relations with alien races such as the Qin.

Of course, Æon has its demands of psions, too; the two have a symbiotic relationship. Æon seeks to meet countless goals that normal humans and hard technology simply cannot accomplish. Psions and their biotech help the Trinity achieve these goals. Thus Æon is at the service of psions, to help in the war they fight, but psions and the orders are beholden to Æon for the support, reinforcement and coordination that it supplies, and also because of influence that the Trinity has over certain proxies and key psions.

Æon's ultimate goal in providing these services and coordinating these efforts is the unification of humanity. The Trinity purports that, according to the vision that inspired the group centuries ago, humanity will fall divided before dangers that we have yet to face. In order to achieve the unity we need to survive, individuals will be expected to — will have to — lay their personal goals aside.

Psions and Æon

Psions typically have obligations to two organizations: their orders and Æon Trinity. The orders created the psions, but in many ways the Æon Trinity created the orders and the Trinity is the catalyst that allows the orders to work together.

The degree to which a psion has allegiance to an order and to Æon depends on the individual. Some psions are completely true to their proxies and take orders from no other (yet the proxies all take orders from Æon to some degree). Some psions have abandoned the orders and work for nations, corporations or the Trinity itself. Most psions find themselves subject to both order and Trinity in varying amounts. No matter where a psion's loyalties lie, he will encounter the Æon Trinity sooner or later.

While Æon does assign basic ranks to psions, it does not require them to live or behave in a regimented fashion. The rank system itself is not military, being little more than a tool allowing for easier interaction between the divisions. The important thing, from the Trinity's point of view, is that the psions are on call and respond to Æon's needs and demands. The Gifted might be required to work alongside normal Trinity agents, to go on missions outlined by the Trinity, or to perform covert operations on the Trinity's behalf. Æon has agendas to pursue against the Aberrants; against hostile aliens such as the Chromatics and Coalition; and against world and space governments, corporations and powerful individuals that contest unification. Æon also explores space and explores the depths of psionic powers. These, of course, are the purviews of almost all psions as well.

A psion undoubtedly knows a number of Æon members and perhaps has regular relations with several. The Trinity is even known to assign liaisons to particular psions. The Gifted don't necessarily work with the Æon Trinity on every mission that they undertake, but they are

bound to encounter Trinity members almost anywhere they go, no matter whose orders they follow, even if they are independent agents. It is therefore difficult for a psion to do anything or go anywhere without Æon learning of it — which can be good or bad, depending on the psion's objectives.

The Trinity's involvement is defined clearly by the organization's three divisions. Directors in Neptune detail the missions themselves, explain Æon objectives, debrief psions and authorize psions' use of or access to ships, gear, resources, data and classified information. Intelligence agents in Triton provide psions with the knowledge and equipment they need to carry out their missions: coordinates of space destinations, data files, current whereabouts of individuals, details on political situations and general background on people and corporations. Proteus agents stand side by side with psions, whether on the front lines of space or in defense of Earth. Proteus agents man ships provided to psions by the Æon Trinity, jump out to the fringes of known space, hunt criminals, counter terrorism, police space ports and stations, and act as couriers.

For the most part, Trinity assignments are coordinated with psions' orders to ensure that all agencies are aware of what the others do, and to avoid conflict. However, not all groups have the same priorities, and rivalries between the orders and with Æon itself can lead to dissension over orders given and actions taken. For the poor psion, this can mean conflicting priorities and confused loyalties; who should be obeyed, order or Æon? That's for the individual to decide, and to suffer any consequences.

The Æon Trinity's involvement in affairs from an interstellar to an individual level cannot be denied. The Trinity pays close attention to events taking place in countries across the globe, on orbital stations and colonies throughout near space, and in outposts beyond the fringes of our solar system. Humanity's progress through the millennia has accelerated dramatically in the past few centuries. It is Æon's goal to assist in the continued development of every government, culture and individual in the present time and into the future.

AFRICA

A continent of many nations, Africa was once crippled by colonization and war. In the 22nd century, African countries have found their power in solidarity. Africa has achieved a sense of "diversity unified in purpose" that far surpasses old ideals of the American melting pot or of the European commonwealth of nations. In Africa, technology melds with tradition, creating advanced interstellar markets against a backdrop of tribal culture. Africa is a flawless grav-crystal wrapped in tanned leathers and sinew cord: a thing both powerful and pure.

During the Crash, Africa's relatively plentiful resources were trapped in capitalistic and nationalistic struggles; infighting denied resources and stability to all. To become strong in both economy and spirit, African leaders realized that they had to rediscover the continent's roots and re-establish the old ways. The United African Nations (UAN) reinstated the intertribal forum and instilled the belief that Africa's hope rested in the hand of every African. Under the UAN's banner, Africa soared into space commerce and jump ship technology, and presently sets world standards in multicultural affairs. The continent was also home to the now missing Upeo wa Macho, and their abandoned base awaits the order's return.

The UAN is a strong rope woven in shades of brown: from the fair Creole islanders of Cape Verde to the midnight-blue-black of the liberated Senegalese. Pride, tradition and prosperity have breathed new life into an old world once ravished by white *uitlanders*. The ancestral lands have been reclaimed by the Bararzaa Kila Kabila Mzee — the Elder Council of Tribal Peoples, commonly called the "B'razaa" — and transformed into a futuristic nirvana by the young warrior classes. The governmental seat embodied in the Nyerere Kusanyiko, in the historic "Conscience of Black Africa" of Tanzania, hosts not only the tribal elects, but also the best and brightest minds of the international political arena. Joining them are visiting dignitaries, public speakers, and Earth-bound spokespeople from offworld colonies and orbital stations.

However, Africa's consolidation efforts, which began in the late 2070s, are not without dissent. The Northern Islamic Fundamentalist movements of Algeria and Egypt exploded into rioting and guerrilla warfare that continue sporadically to the present. Hordes of Berbers and Sunni overtook the fisheries and drug-export channels of Morocco, effectively holding the country hostage until the military intervened. Today,

North Africa is a world stage for political protests, self-proclaimed prophets of Kush and Islamic radical movements, and the target of a host of bombing and assassination attempts from neighboring dissidents and ever-present Global White Supremacists. Although the UAN is single-minded in its purpose, its policies are not practiced throughout the continent. This internal strife is the greatest threat to the UAN's future prosperity.

Space Development

One of the Consolidation's most successful ventures is the training facility built on the contested Ogadeu desert, between Somalia and Ethiopia. The Axum Institute is a nexus for many Africans aspiring to futures in astrotechnology and orbital careers. Named after the first East African Empire, Axum features the first micro-g simulation course on Earth, an exchange program to the underwater Pearl City in the Caribbean, and a qualifying internship program on UAN's orbital station *Mujukuu*. The crew of the *Luthuli Moja*, the first UAN space colony transport, consisted of 14 Axum graduates.

Ports

Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta spaceport shines as the first and still largest commercial extrasolar transport launch site on Earth. Only the Olympus spaceport on Luna surpasses the African port's traffic volume. Over 50 major transports travel daily to and from Jomo Kenyatta to the near space orbital stations and Lunar colonies, and connect with flights for Mars and beyond. "Hopper" ships piggyback on the *Mujukuu* orbital station for rendezvous with the station's scientists and UAN defense crews.

Nigeria houses the Upeo wa Macho spaceport, the only other African port of Jomo's class. Home to the first teleportation jump station, teleporters themselves directed most of the Upeo port's traffic. Africa lost much of its competitive edge in space commerce when the teleporter order vanished. Police and Legion squads routinely clear away squatter camps of relatives, tourists and benign youth cults that cluster around the closed station. Kept sealed the past five years, the jump station awaits the Upeos' return. All of Africa celebrates Proxy Bolade Atwan's birthday.

Strangely, psions who visited the teleporters' base after the Upeos' disappearance, and psions who are permitted to visit today report that the site is psionically "dead." Apparently the place is simply devoid of activity on a subquantum level, the physical realm psions sense and manipulate with their powers. This is the only place known to be "inert" on Earth and in explored space. How this phenomenon relates to the disappearance of the Upeo is unknown.

ISRA also operates a launch station near the Nigerian border, with sister launch sites in Mali, Chad, Egypt and Zambia, for use by the nomadic clairsentients.

Commerce

Mining and interstellar colonization comprise Africa's primary space-faring goals. China's shift in 2067 from a gold- to a platinum-based economy, a move followed by the rest of the interstellar community, raised Africa to a new level of wealth. Africa's sizable platinum reserves enabled the nations to adopt the new standard with relative ease. African miners' dedication to the trade has been rivaled only by their quality. The Nooitgeadact mine still functioned even under siege by Aberrant Pauly Natal and his cult of followers in 2052. The ransom attempt was staged to fund the Aberrants' fanatical quest for the Seventh Seal. The miners resolved the 11-day standoff in a brief but bloody revolt.

African mining operations and space colonies make up the majority of UAN investments. The one exception is *Mafaa-3*, the scientific research station off of Jupiter's moon Io. The terawatt lasers mounted on platforms at Ioan Lagrange points have been modified since *Mafaa-3*'s original inception as an exploratory mining station. Now the arrays focus outward into

The UAN Mission Statement and Consolidation Credo

— engraved plaque outside the Nyerere Kusanyiko, the UAN's governmental seat, in Tanzania

We, the appointed representatives of the United African Nations, will continually strive for the benefit of Africa — our People, our Land and in the Spirit of our ancestral vision. We will be both teacher to and student of our Africa, we will be both our own People and a unified People of our Africa, and Africa will achieve awe with one foot firmly planted on our home soil and the other stepping toward the outstretched horizon.

space, studied primarily as a means of developing near-light-speed travel. The arrays also make a formidable defense system.

The enterprising UAN uses the arrays recently to propel solar sail ships to pinpoint destinations in settled space. These laser sailing jaunts, the final leg home on luxury space cruises, looks to be a commercial success.

Along with tremendous benefits, success in space has cost Africa. Africans grieve for the crews, scientists, colonists and miners lost during expansion to the stars. The most painful loss was that of the Karroo Mining Colony in the Chromatics' infamous first attack. UAN citizens raise black flags embroidered with stylized renderings of the aliens as iridescent, fin-backed reptiles in remembrance of the massacre.

The Vocoder

— Dr. Keiran Baxter, *The Technological Age*
© 2110 Walkabout Press

Africa's Consolidation resulted in a small device that changed the world. Unification was initially hampered by Africans' inability to communicate easily. The "vocoder," or vocal translator, was an invention born of necessity, created by the Nihonjin upon demand of would-be UAN leaders. The vocoder cannot breach the cultural differences that exist in Africa (and with humanity in general), but it does allow for a clearer exchange of ideas than was ever possible before. The standard vocoder's ability to store and translate up to five languages brought mutual understanding to entire nations.

Vocoders are available today in a wide variety of styles from standard, small-business and localized models to advanced "ear clip" add-ons for the international commerce and orbital station markets. High-end models can translate 10 to 20 foreign languages into the listener's native speech. Africa has acquired the license to produce all vocoders in exchange for resources paid to Nippon.

Middle East

According to the latest round of ISRAn scans, the levels of Aberrant taint remaining in the bombed-out deserts of the Arabian Peninsula are even higher than previously thought. The Damascus region, Abu Dhabi and the corridor from Mecca to Bahrain are generally considered environmentally "unsalvageable."

Old news for the Middle East, which bore the longest and most painful brunt of the Aberrant War. Not only did the war ruin OPEC's attempt to rebuild itself in the wake of the oil crash, but the destruction of Jerusalem by Aberrants provoked a wave of sectarian wars and social upheaval. By the time the religious tumult and infighting died down only Israel-Judah, Oman, Persia and the Turkic Federation remained viable as nation-states. And while these countries have sustained themselves into the new century, they have yet to be a force in modern society.

Decades of chemical, nuclear and Aberrant warfare reduced much of the Middle East to a mass of balkanized tribal states and localized pockets of power. These quasi-national groups are monitored constantly by the UAN, the Chinese orbital surveillance network, the psi orders and the Æon Trinity for signs of resurgent violence. As a disproportionate amount of taint seems to remain in the toxic wastes, monitoring forces are especially careful to check for signs of Aberrant mutation. Various patrols make routine sweeps, searching for new and old Aberrants since both seem drawn to this region.

The Israel-Judah bloc, the only major political power in the Middle East, remains strictly isolationist. As Israel continues to integrate the post-2061 territories into a single economy, the hermit nation insists that it desires to be "left to go its own way." Meanwhile evidence suggests that the rebuilt Jerusalem has stepped up its already intensive psi research program, possibly putting it on par with the programs of Shanghai and Medellín.

Other rumors (as yet unsubstantiated) indicate that Israel may be working on some sort of divergent biotech with

military applications. Orgotek psions who patrol the Middle East have reported simultaneous changes in the subquantum universe toward both life and death, as if neither and both occur, or that they are in a state of flux. The psions are baffled by this new sensation, and further investigation is pending.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the horror of the last century, many sects based on Sufi or Ba'hai doctrines stress the value of the universal human spirit, beyond national or religious boundaries. This is especially visible in the recent wave of Arabic literature available in the world marketplace. Millions of people, especially in Russia, Turkey and the Indonesian city-states, are finding comfort and inspiration in these hyper-contemporary works, the first large body of literature to incorporate the psi experience into text.

Muzzein Bang: The Next Sound of Anima?

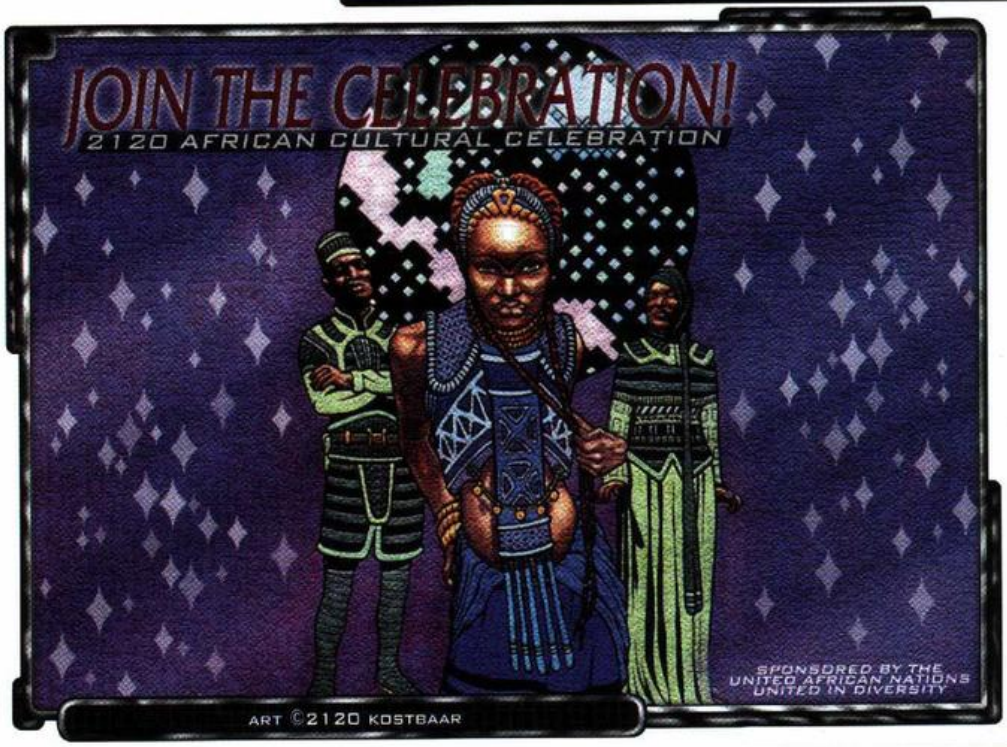
— Excerpt: *floatparty*, 5.2118

Get ready for the next big thing. Just when you thought the post-anima future was safe, here comes Muzzein bang, the demon love child of Marrakesh bang, anima culture and...the clairsentient order?

"It's great stuff," says bangboy Adrienne-Hong Shari, perennial fixture of the Djakarta anima scene. "They've taken the hypnotic parts of Marrakesh and thrown a ghost spin on the media. You get a zigged Muzzein divina plugged into the mix station, a psion who can really sing down shekh and call the numbers at the same time, and it's better than religion."

floatparty's own Trampolina agrees: "As the Old Man will tell you, Muzzein had to happen. The Anima Continuum wanted it that way. It's a symcause of all the anima transforms that are hitting humanity now. Bioware and island politics and the Collapse and the psi uncoding — all that demanded Muzzein, yeh?"

The "Old Man" himself, intersolar citizen Otha Herzog, could not be reached for interview. He sent *floatparty* a prepared statement in which he offered his hope that Muzzein would continue expanding the noetic awareness of the young. Since most Muzzein divinas are faithful ISRAns, he shouldn't have to worry. Mr. Herzog also wanted to let Ms. Shari know that he considers Muzzein to not be "better than," but just as good as religion in its own way, although he rarely has time to listen to it himself.



Welcome to the Asian Century. The ancient civilizations of Asia are putting new technologies to use throughout human space, fueling a dramatic synthesis of new culture and a rich sense of opportunity and expansionism. Not only have the Asian powers paved the Pacific and transformed the world economy, they are now terraforming Mars and colonizing the outer reaches of the solar system — and beyond. In particular, China, having conquered space, turns inward to conquer the intricacies of the psi universe itself, and the mysteries of human consciousness. Asia is on the move.

The problem facing Asia is an ancient one: overpopulation. China has overextended itself, growing too quickly for resources to compensate. The enormous demands of the Asian population tax modern land and water agricultural methods.

Just as ominously, social structures and cultural norms that safeguarded Asian civilization for thousands of years are now breaking down faster than new traditions can be proposed. Nippon, in particular, has suffered irreparable cultural damage.

Zhongguo (China)

While other nations challenge China's claims to cultural superiority, it's difficult to dispute the popular belief that China is the focal point of the 22nd century. Since tipping their hand with the 2061 Ultimatum, the Chinese have been the dominant power not only in Asia, but in space.

The Great Leap Upward

The best way to explore the political character of China today is to examine how the country achieved orbital ascendancy. When the state council ordered the move into space exploration, it diverted enormous national reserves from education and domestic development. The Chinese people went without medicines, safety measures, agricultural machinery and, eventually, even indoor heating. Public resources (like vehicles and communications systems) were confiscated and sold to other nations to provide additional funds. Despite Beijing's claims to the contrary, an estimated 14 million people died from disease, hunger and accidents as a direct result of the Great Leap.

It was an unpleasant chapter in Chinese history, but it was successful. Yet even today, Beijing works to maintain the appearance that China is orderly and prosperous, even if the people must suffer at times. Witness the burnout of the Yunnan fusion dome. Outsiders can only speculate at the full scope of the tragedy. The dome is still absent from official Ministry of Energy reports today.

Absolute Power

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective* © 2113 OBC

China literally held the power of life and death over everyone on Earth. The example of Bahrain demonstrated China's ability to destroy any nation, and the political will to do so. Moreover, it seemed that China was largely undamaged by the Aberrant War.

So why didn't China conquer the world? Perhaps its government was as tired of war as everyone else was. Perhaps the country was in worse shape than it let on; there's still a lot we don't know about Chinese internal affairs during this period. Perhaps the Politburo wasn't completely behind the Ultimatum and another faction ordered the fusion platforms to stand down.

Perhaps it was a simple, momentary act of human fellowship. We know that China fared better during the Crash than any other country (in fact, by leading the switch to a hrd currency system based on a platinum trade standard, it led the way toward international recovery). Maybe stability was a more practical advantage to work with than ruling a destroyed planet.

The Autonomous Regions

The Chinese sphere of influence includes most of eastern Asia. Although China follows the same basic government model it has used for centuries, Beijing allows each local government outside of China proper a surprising amount of self-government. The locals set their own social agendas freely, as long as Beijing remains their primary trading partner and political patron. As the slogan goes, there is "One China," but "Many Systems" in Asia today, where internal borders are deliberately vague but diversity is (at least officially) considered beneficial.

The Philippines and Korea are special cases. Made full partner in all Chinese technology and commercial space efforts in 2104, the Philippines owes its privileged status within the Chinese sphere to the machinations of Minister Bue, telepath proxy and Chinese Minister of Psionic Affairs. The psi institute at Quezon is the headquarters of China's fledgling biotech research program, as well as a premier training facility for psions from all orders.

Korea, once an independent state (or even two), is now a semiautonomous arm of Chinese civilization proper. The highlands of Pyongyang are home to the Asian deep-space industry, and to China's computer research factories. Despite rumors of "silicon sweatshops" and armed guards in laboratories, Korea appears to enjoy its position as the hardtech wizard behind Chinese power. Competition with Nippon keeps the Koreans working hard, perhaps harder than any other people on Earth.

Psions outside the Ministry who have trained in Asia, and potent psions abroad, have made allegations against the Korean government that the country's unusually high death rate is a direct result of inhumane work conditions. Minister Bue and Korean leaders deny any such abuse. If the Korean people were overtaxed, they posit, surely Ministry telepaths would sense it.

Society and Culture

Confidence and national pride are proof of the Chinese people's subtle conviction that China's ascendancy is the logical result of their being the most pragmatic and sensible people on Earth. Events of centuries past have taught the Chinese that foreigners have strengths, and the wise learn what foreign cultures do well and adopt those techniques (though not the foreigners) for Chinese purposes.

Although ancient art forms and customs are still practiced, the Chinese find global trends fascinating, especially in psi research. This may be due in part to the fact that the telepath order

Welcome to Xianggang!

— Cori Heisler, *The Painful Truth* © 2117 MMI

In the century since it was an independent colony known as Hong Kong, Xianggang has become Asia's commercial gateway to the stars, the heart of Chinese mercantile, corporate and passenger spaceflight. Ulanbator's vast industrial shipyards may be larger, and Shanghai may still handle most of China's domestic shipping and hardtech trade with Nippon, but Xianggang is Orbital City. Look out Jomo station; Xianggang is on your tail.

is a branch of the Chinese government, with telepaths and other affiliated Gifted interacting with everyday citizens. Chinese noetic research is world-famous, and the Shanghai Psi Institute, run by the Ministry, has a vigorous outreach program, testing most urban children for psi potential at an early age.

However, people's increasing awareness of international events and customs cause the Chinese government stress. Beijing faces numerous insurgent movements, particularly in the Autonomous Regions. All but those in Xinjiang and Taiwan (and occasionally Xizang) are relatively minor, but even with the Ministry's help, keeping them from the world's attention requires substantial military and propaganda resources. More serious resistance factions in China include hardline anti-psi groups, the Young Marxians and other Mao Restoration societies, as well as the radical "individualist" Anima Music Society centered in Manchurian universities. The Ministry of Psionic Affairs handles these difficult cases.

Telepaths Win Fight for Catholics in China

— *Newsday* holobrief
© 11.21.2113 GN

In an announcement that marks the end of decades of official persecution of Christianity in China, the Chinese State Council stated it will lift the special restrictions imposed on Roman Catholics in Asia. This announcement apparently came after a protracted power struggle between Rebecca Bue Li, Minister of Psionic Affairs, and certain elements of the conservative wing of the Chinese government.

A child of the Catholic Philippines, Ms. Bue Li remains sympathetic to Catholic issues worldwide, despite having left the Church. She was one of the first women to petition for Jesuit training after the 2084 Vatican Conference, but did not complete the regimen.

Nippon

When the Japanese islands reopened in 2103, after sequestering themselves since before the Aberrant War, those privileged foreigners allowed to visit Nippon described it as "a futuristic wonderland." Now that the Quarantine is a dim memory, old assumptions of this important but reclusive nation must be re-evaluated.

Nippon, as Japan is now known, is the undisputed world leader in technological research. Hardtech is integrated into all aspects of local culture and is the foundation of the nation's economy. The state focuses its international involvement in the arena of technology, trading licenses to inventions (such as the UAN vocoder and the gill-breather apparatus vital to activity in undersea cities) in exchange for diplomatic favors or credit in biomass and heavy metals. Other, more complicated patents are manufactured by the Nihonjin themselves and sold to an eager world that (by and large) can no longer keep up with the technologies involved.

The Fortress Islands — Behind the Electronic Curtain

Most consider the hardtech playground of the 22nd century to be "futuristic," but it is debatable whether the Home Islands' vast artificial urban sprawl represents the future of humanity. Hiding behind protective screens, Nippon was perhaps the only major nation to suffer less damage from the Aberrant War than China did. But there are those who claim that this security has become Nippon's doom.

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

THE "QUARANTINE BROADCAST"

— broadcast continuously over Radio Japan, 5.7 — 12.31.2047

It is with great regret that the Japanese people must inform the community of nations that the Home Islands will be closed to all unnecessary traffic for an indeterminate duration, effective at 10 A.M. GMT on May 8, 2047. This decision is motivated by a desire to fortify Japan's sovereign borders against the growing epidemic of worldwide terrorism and should not be considered an attack on any national government or its policies. Trade will continue as normal. All terrestrial and orbital cargos bound for Japan will now be routed through the Okinawa facility for inspection and eventual transport to the Home Islands.

Those with diplomatic business in Japan should address their concerns with Japan's arm in the global sphere, the lower chamber of the United Nations. *Aum Soto.*

Nihonjin Emperor Hospitalized

— *Newsflash* © 11.2.2116 Genman Enterprises

Kazuhito, Emperor of Nippon and a lifelong sufferer of Total Allergy Syndrome, fell ill today during a ceremonial visit from Australian diplomats. When the medical resources of the imperial palace failed to improve the emperor's condition, he was rushed to the emergency ward of a Tokyo hospital.

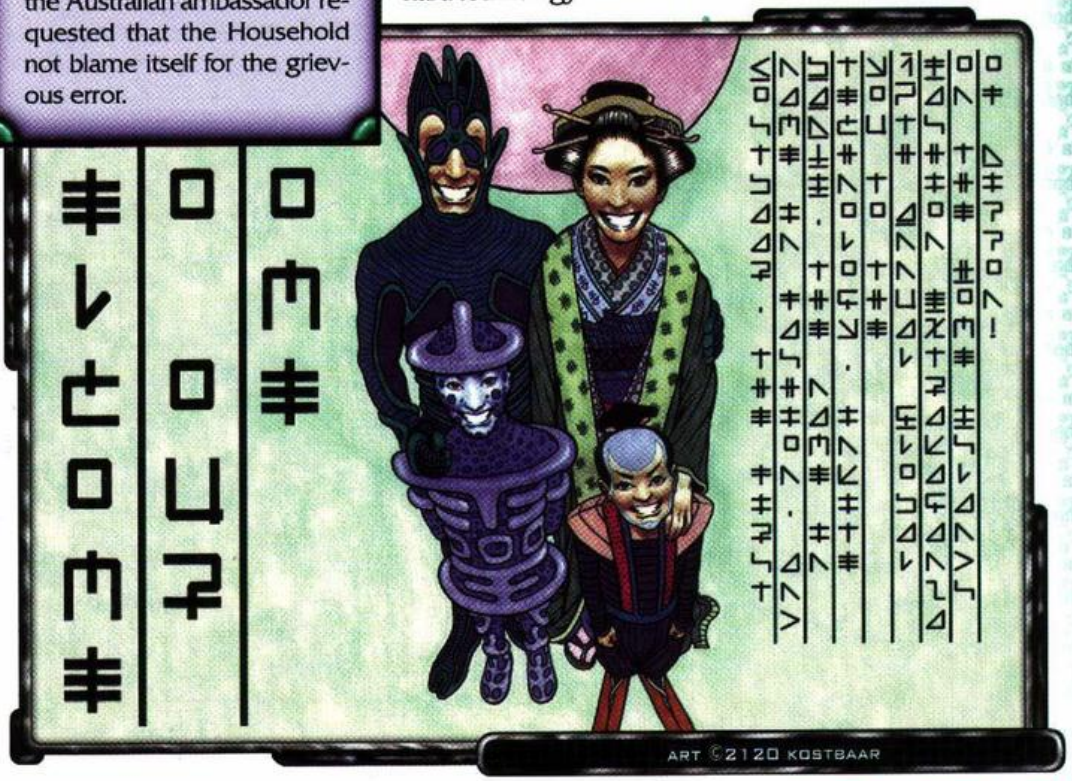
The incident apparently arose from a misunderstanding on the part of the Australian party. Failing to follow the Imperial Household's strict medical protocols, a member of the foreign delegation arrived with trace amounts of cologne on his person. This substance, ordinarily undetectable, triggered the emperor's attack. In her formal apology, the Australian ambassador requested that the Household not blame itself for the grievous error.

Hardtech, rigid angles, sharp edges — this is the Nippon of 2120. Having stared so long into the mirror of their own culture, isolated from the world, the Nihonjin are now trapped by the stifling demands of living on overdeveloped islands. They are no longer comfortable in the outside world and appear to withdraw ever further into their own artificial dominion. An estimated 28% of Nihonjin suffer from neurotic disorders, especially Ant Farm and Total Allergy Syndromes. Domestic violence, random homicide and irrational terrorism are at epidemic proportions among the Nihonjin urban classes.

The Triumph of Artifice

Considering their almost symbiotic relationship with biotech, the Qin view hard technology with an almost childlike wonder. The aliens call the Home Islands the most "elegant" regions built by humans, an ultimate triumph of hardtech over nature. Parts of Nippon are even more artificial than an orbital environment. During the Quarantine, much of the Honshu landmass was sifted for raw materials and then reconstructed. Polymer plastic songbirds sing and orchids bloom. Massive environmental generators create artificial weather within the polymer and plassteel arcologies. The Nihonjin re-create their environment continually to suit their unique tastes.

Natural childbirth has tighter regulations (and is less common) than the manufacture of "artificial life." An important minority of autonomous robots and SI (satisfactory intelligence) simulacra exists in work places. Quick to stress that they do not consider



ART ©2120 KOSTBAAR

Architectural Design > Akira van Woc c.2050

computer simulacra "alive," Nihonjin nonetheless have a disturbing tendency to treat SIs like pets or children.

Just as SI "dolls" and interactive computer agents mimic humanity in Nippon, so do humans aspire to artifice. Industry emphasizes loyalty to the corporate "cyber-mentality," with employees serving as mobile nodes and expressions of that mentality. Corporations are often given form by programmers — SI cybershinto flourishes, with growing numbers of semiautonomous personae infesting computer systems like ancestral spirits haunting a family shrine. Nihonjin society is an eerie reflection of the modern computer network — not surprising, since Nippon was instrumental in developing the OpNet's current configuration.

The Nihonjin establishment has very little interest in psi or its potential applications. Psi is used in Nippon as simply another resource. Those Nihonjin citizens who possess strong psi capacity are typically alienated and join underground subcultures or emigrate to one of the various Psi Nippon expatriate communities located throughout human space. Nihonjin society integrates biotech even less, used only when absolutely necessary.

Nihonjin Law

Introducing biotechnology of any sort to the Home Islands or their holdings without adhering to immunization procedures demanded by the Nippon government is a capital offense. Nihonjin dedication to hardtech has led to stringent legislation on the importation and use of biotech. And yet this almost paranoid opposition to bioapps suggests a more compelling reason for Nihonjin resistance.

Nippon enforces its laws to the fullest, as was proven in 2109 when three psions, including a member of The Ministry, entered Nippon air space with biotech and were apprehended, incarcerated, their bioapps confiscated and their trials scheduled in a matter of hours. Only delicate political negotiation spared the psions' lives. Their bioapps were never returned.

OpNet in the 22nd Century

— Dr. Kieran Baxter,
The Technological Age
© 2110 Walkabout Press

Information systems in the 22nd century are a marvel of paranoid design. Kuwasha's pulse in 2061 caused a devastating loss of information; when the OpNet was reconfigured in the following years, a conscious decision was made to develop nodes that were completely isolated from one another.

This trend has continued into the current century, led mainly by Nippon, despite naysayers' claims that governments are being overly paranoid. The Aberrants' return has justified the paranoia, however, as there have already been a half-dozen Aberrant attempts to duplicate Kuwasha's pulse. Due to regimented node configurations, none of these electronic attacks has caused more than minor data loss and inconvenience.

Optic links exist at each node, but are kept locked down except for strictly regulated transmissions. The link sites are watched closely by SI computer systems, human technicians and electrokinetic monitors, and gigantic screening programs cycle continuously as well. These people and terabytes are set to cause a router shutdown on a nanosecond's notice. Since Kuwasha's pulse overwhelmed normal electronic safeguards, this shutdown is physical. Small charges are set to destroy a link site rather than allow another potential tragedy. Link sites are modular and easily (if expensively) replaced.

Island Politics

The foreign strategy of the zaibatsu (the sole arm of Nihonjin government) is simple, but has become as rarefied and complex as the rest of Nihonjin society. Es-

sentially, Nippon has no allegiances and no enemies. The nation maintains a respectful distance from all world powers. Its neutrality is a tool used as skillfully as any hardtech device. Even the Trinity has trouble piercing the "electronic curtain" surrounding Nippon. As long as primary sources of raw materials remain secure and the world ignores the Home Islands, the Nihonjin will continue ignoring the world from a protected position. They see their role in world politics, if any, as that of mediators, intercessors and, strangely, curators of those aspects of other cultures that they find interesting.

The Floating Gardens

Other than its hardtech supremacy (including rumors of devices that outshine easily even the most highly advanced gear on the market today) and elegant diplomatic strategy, Nippon's only real resource is its orbital presence. Nihonjin space is a small but almost entirely roboticized network of manufacturing outposts and mining installations devoted to the location, processing and transport of mineral resources. The Home Islands cannot afford to waste anything. Nihonjin orbital refineries are incredibly efficient, using increasingly sensitive sorting arrays to extract as many precious raw substances as possible for home consumption.

The Nihonjin them- selves do not to take well to extraterrestrial lifestyles. With the exception of the colony at Olympus (established well before the Quarantine), a few manned research stations, Psi Nippon and other émigré groups, few Nihonjin ever leave Earth orbit.

— Excerpt: *Anima Asia* © 2118, Walkabout Press

Southeast Asia is a world leader in integrating bioware and psi-influenced cultural developments into its society. Orgotek's influence is apparent in the great Anima Cities of Bangkok and Funan. The metropolises are biotech wonderlands, and host a number of Qin dignitaries who consider the cities homes away from home.

These regions are centers of so-called "anima society." "Anima" refers to the "spirit-within-all-things" philosophy that pervades much of youth culture today. Anima society concerns itself with discovering natural and organic elements in the surrounding world. The trend allows for any degree of extrapolation. Anima is commonly a means to understand the human condition more clearly, but many apply it to developing new musical and fashion styles, or to integrating bioware into everyday life — and some even use it to relate to hard technology in ways never considered before.

Anima culture's most dedicated adherents are teens and young adults. This generation's fresh perspective finds new ways of merging psi and science, and bioware and hardware, that escape even the most astute adults.

India

Considered the third most important power in Asia behind China and Nippon, the Indian League boasts both the world's largest and most vital population base and a fierce dedication to global diplomacy and mediation not seen since the Swiss of previous centuries.

As the starting point of many so-called New Religions spreading through settled space, India is an arbiter for global morality and ethics. Bombay hosts the annual World Ethics Conferences, New Delhi handles mediation for Middle Eastern and Central Asian disputes, and a number of human rights associations are based in the subcontinent. India is also the birthplace of anima culture.

Russian Federation

Russia is a land trying desperately to make up for missed opportunities. With a wealth of resources and millions of able bodies from Petrograd into the Chinese Co-Development Zone, by all rights Russia should be shoulder-to-shoulder with China, Brazil and the UAN. A selfish and short-sighted Russian government held the great nation back in the 21st century, and Russia hasn't caught up yet.

When Borsov assumed the presidency in 2050, Russia's space exploration showed marked but still minor progress. Russia's long-term extraterrestrial efforts looked promising, but Borsov and his staff saw greater political glory in directing their efforts against the Aberrants.

Russia became one of the strongest aggressors against Aberrants. Ironically, the nation wasn't a hot spot of Aberrant activity until Borsov threw down the gauntlet. Strong enough to weather the Aberrant War better than Europe or North America, Russia came through it strained and battered nonetheless. Russia's Crash involved deposing Borsov and working toward space development once again. Unfortunately, the Russian economy was in a shambles, restricting feasible development of any kind. Its free market economy suffered much like that of the rest of the west, its resources plentiful but its ability to process them restricted. The government looked for options, and found them in Russia's neighbors.

Even with the destruction caused by the Chernobyl dome's partial collapse, the vast Russian steppe is the largest agricultural zone ever cultivated. Russia's grain buys her friends, notably India and the orbital stations. Russia also holds the second-largest platinum deposits on Earth. Such wealth inspires North and South American political relations, as well.

Russia doesn't have the financial resources and equipment currently to develop the agricultural lands and platinum mines to their optimum potential. The Co-Development Zone, Russia's lease of her eastern territory to China, gives Russia the necessary technology and China a significant amount of grain and mineral resources.

The Russian people are not all sanguine about renting out Siberia to a foreign power. Rebel factions and mercenary groups harass the mines and transport routes, redirecting shipments meant for China. Russian soldiers refuse to take up arms against their own, so Chinese military and Russian-hired Legionnaires struggle with the outlaws.

Already exploited by its eastern allies, Russia is cautious of binding its fate to that of Europe. Despite repeated overtures from the Swiss, plans for a "Euro-Russian Commonwealth" have stalled, repeatedly rejected as "inappropriate" by the mercenary boyars of Moskva, Petrograd and Kiev. Russia has observers in Zurich-Geneva, but discussions so far has been inconclusive.

Political experts and economic gurus agree that Russia could be a major player on the world stage. The venerable nation must first quell its internal squabbling, choose a single direction and move forward with resolve.

The United States of America are united no longer. Europe is an economic wreck best characterized by the smoking crater that dominates the French landscape. Asia is a troubled land ruled by China's iron fist. South America's governments bow to the wishes of crime. Where is the common man to go to escape these titanic forces? Where is there room for the common man to realize his dreams? Australia.

In the wake of global changes, Australia has stepped into those places vacated by the superpowers of yesteryear. Let China and Brazil have all the power. Let America and Europe scramble to regain their bygone glory. Australia will take in all the souls who are squeezed out by such power plays. Australia took a gamble after the Aberrant War, reversing a formerly isolationist stance to market itself aggressively to the world. The gamble paid off; the land down under is known as both the last refuge of the middle class and as the entertainment empire of the 22nd century.

The New Melting Pot

When the Aberrant War broke out, fate spared Australia. The continent wasn't enough of a player in the war to interest many Aberrants. Australia was neither a superpower nor a nation with any particular military might.

The Aberrant War came and went, leaving Australia largely untouched. With the middle class of the world bereft of a home, Australia presented itself as the land of opportunity. Anywhere from 50 to 500 settlers would combine their funds and purchase a small fusion reactor. Once energy was on hand, all that remained was effort — and the dispossessed had that in surplus. Before long, new communities dotted the Outback.

The Media

Publicity attracted Australia's population of expatriates, and publicity keeps them there. Sydney and Melbourne are the new global entertainment capitals, and network satellites transmit a dreamland of images across the Outback. Many new settlements invest in satellite dishes even before buying fusion reactors.

The world's five media giants are all based in Australia. They vie for ratings and netlinks with the same intensity as nations struggle for political supremacy.

Australia Today

Although the megameds possess enormous influence, they have not subsumed government. The media corporations are content with "control of the population through entertainment." They leave

policy- and decision-making to the government — as long as the appropriate respect is paid to the media, of course.

Australia's ruling body is its Parliament — a consistency that pro-Australian publicists are quick to point out. Australia's current Prime Minister is Luis Trenton, formerly a colonel in the Australian Air Force. He is well-loved by the public for his military background and forthright manner. His participation in anti-Aberrant raids adds considerably to his image. In fact, Australia — already rabidly anti-Aberrant — has become virtually xenophobic during Trenton's terms.

Despite the open arms policy of the past 60 years, a number of Australians fear and resent outsiders. These groups seek self-sufficiency and even self-government. Outback settlements that have provided for themselves for years, from sustenance to protection to local decision-making, now seek official autonomous status. It would seem that settlements intend to isolate themselves even from the rest of the continent. The Australian Parliament has yet to respond to these requests, but the clamor grows, and settlers become restless as their voices continue to go unheard.

Criticism of Parliament also arises over the ongoing Aborigine plight, which has been intensified by the continent's population increase. Like the national "melting pot" that preceded it, Australia faces the problems of cultural suffocation that come with multicultural infusion, particularly for its indigenous peoples and minorities.

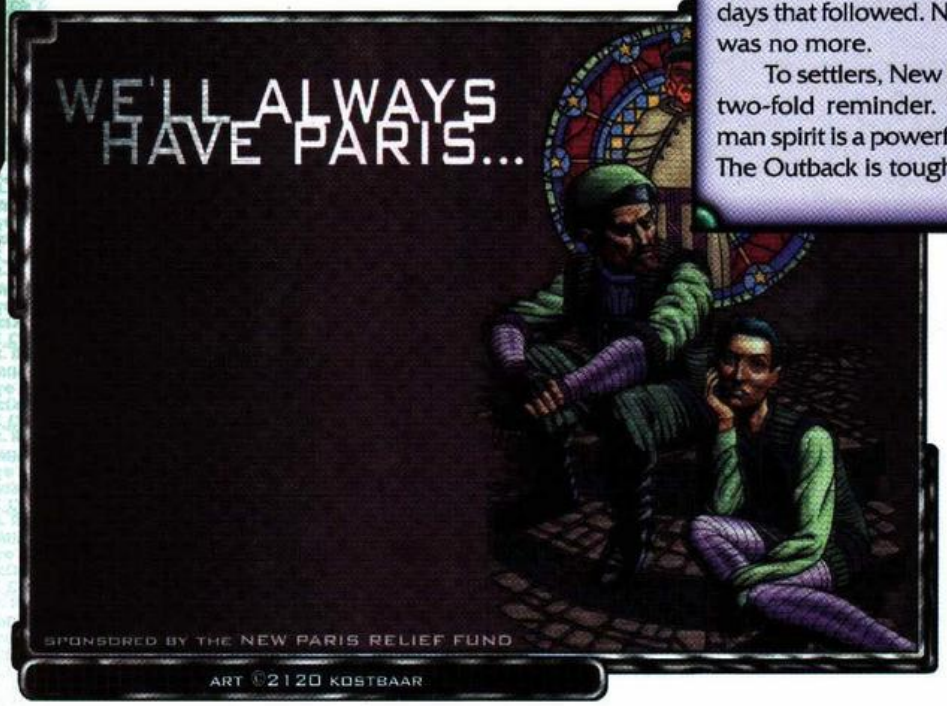
New Paris — The First Settlement

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective* © 2116 OBC

Now a national monument, New Paris was the first of Australia's settlements. Settled by French fleeing the chaos of wartime Europe, it was to be a shining example of the power of hope and of the strength of ambition. New Paris was built in 13 days and served as a tribute to the human spirit for 17 more.

Exactly one month after construction of New Paris began, things went wrong. The settlers had bought a second-hand reactor, one with a microscopic crack in the core. The reactor explosion killed 60% of the town's population instantly. Bandits, raiders and wild animals descended upon the settlement in the days that followed. New Paris was no more.

To settlers, New Paris is a two-fold reminder. The human spirit is a powerful thing. The Outback is tougher.



After nearly a century of devastation and reconstruction, Europe remains a continent of ruined cities and fragmented nations. Although reforming the European Commonwealth is a step toward restoring the continent, the root of Europe's problems is not political but cultural. Despite Zurich-Geneva's best efforts in leading the EC into a new era, European nations have trouble accepting that they are no longer the world center of culture and commerce. The remnants of old nations bicker for concessions in the EC, while the young turn away from tradition entirely in favor of new ways of life.

Ironically, these new ways are often the oldest. Religion has filled the void created by the collapse of national power. With the loss of French rationalism, the European mind turns increasingly to mysticism and the continent's ritual heritage. An indeterminate number of cults and agrarian-socialist splinter groups have sprung up. This new mysticism is accompanied by a flood of stories about psi "saints" and "angelic visitations."

The French would have found the irony amusing. The Dark Ages have returned to Europe in an era anticipated otherwise as the most hopeful for humanity. Modern Europeans dwell in a ruined urban forest, a world haunted by ghosts and angels. The youth of Europe look above the forest, to the stars, while the superpowers' orbital stations loom bright in the firmament. The Urban Schism continues in Europe, with thousands of European slummers retreating to small villages.

Yet dark as it is on the European continent, a spark of perseverance still flickers. Despite every setback these nations have suffered in the past century, the people's will remains strong. Many Europeans have relocated to Australia or Luna, but an inordinate amount remain in their homelands, trying to rebuild their once-great cultures. Many leap at the chance to undertake space expeditions for foreign corporations or governments, not only to help heal the European economy but to prove to the rest of the world that Europeans are still vital to shaping human progress.

Politically, the European continent comprises a mass of local interests held together by the sheer stubbornness and limited resources of the European people, particularly the Swiss. After Zurich-Geneva, the Barcelona, London, Hamburg, Bruxe, Milan, Copenhagen, Ljubjana and Budapest metroplexes dominate the major remaining arcological

France: Five Years After

— *London Circle*
© 9.19.2119 Rafat, Inc.

FRENCH PERMANENT REFUGEE ZONE — Mourners from as far away as Titan came to Tours today to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the *Esperanza* disaster. In a holotaped statement, Otha Herzog offered his prayers and sympathy on behalf of ISRA for the survivors of France and the people of Europe. "The tragedy of the *Esperanza* affects us all profoundly. In time, the true meaning of the disaster will become known and the bereaved may gain some comfort from the martyrdom of the dead. For now, ISRA joins in the mourning, both for the lost French spirit and for the great paralysis visited upon the larger European community."

The orbital station *Esperanza*, launched by the EC in 2112, was recognized as Europe's last hope for establishing a space presence. The Aberrant attack on the station two years later sent it back to Earth, where it disintegrated and rained over western Europe. Hundreds of pieces of debris detonated the French power grid and hit in destructive shock waves as far away as Genoa, Sardinia and Algiers. An estimated 11 million people were killed outright by the power grid explosions; deaths due to radiation poisoning and other complications may eventually raise the final toll to twice that. Without the continued support of the psi orders, it is unlikely that France will ever recover as a habitable center. As a Permanent Refugee Zone, France is co-administered by the EC and the Æsculapian Order.

Each of the surviving great cities has its own character and its own strategy for regaining prominence on the world stage. For some this means seeking alliances with the new superpowers. To others this means experimenting with social metamorphosis or gambling on new technologies. For most, however, survival simply means that Europeans are forced to rely on their natural talents and energy, and will rise or fall as a result.

Indeed, each arcology proclaims its unique cultural and historic heritage eagerly, in hopes of bringing desperately needed tourist yuan into local economies. Nostalgia, one of Europe's few remaining commodities, brings with it a jealous protection of remaining art and architecture.

Europe has a difficult road ahead. The continent may never recover completely from the devastation it faced in the last century. Pockets of lush countryside struggle to flourish amid sprawling urban decay. Even the most advanced European arcologies are outdated compared to the gleaming African or Chinese metroplexes. The crumbling ruins of places like Paris, Berlin, the Netherlands and Stockholm serve as stark reminders of the tremendous losses Europe suffered. But if the European spirit is any indication, these once great nations will rise again.

regions. Rome, as center of the newly revitalized Catholic order, has demanded special status. This fact irritates the Swiss, who consider the Vatican a rival in an already exhausted continent.

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

VIGILENTIAM CONTRA APOSTATIO

— Excerpt: Pope Benedict XVIII's 2118 pronouncement

It is also grievous that our brothers and sisters in Brazil have fallen so far into complacency while the practice of heretical modes of fortune-telling, conjuration of spirits and voluntary spirit possession continue growing in their midst. We have sent members of the Society of Jesus to Brazil to inform those taken in by this "Candomblist Heresy" that this is an unacceptable adulteration of the teaching of our lord Jesus Christ. If the Umbandists care to claim scientific merit for their practices, then let them do so under the guidelines established in *De Naturis Vibus Mentis* and claim no more "supernatural" or "spiritist" provenance for their efficacy.

If, however, they refuse to do so (or cannot), then they must either desist their practices or endure separation from God and the body of the Church. The Society of Jesus will decide.

For those elsewhere, and particularly to the children of Europe, whose kingdoms have been cast down by the work of the Aberrants, I ask that you pray often and honestly before giving yourself over to the lust for "miracles." Before you follow a living saint, allow the scientists to ascertain that the stigmata are in fact miraculous proofs of God and not simply manifestations of the natural powers of the mind. While it is proper to offer veneration unto saints, adulation of the psionically gifted is a sin of idolatry.

The once-proud United States of America, including Canada and portions of Mexico in the 22nd century, has become a loose confederation since the Aberrant War. The old United States' economic might was one of the biggest obstacles to the Aberrants' victory, and their strategies, disorganized though they were, hinged on destroying the superpower.

Although Aberrants seemed to have no specific geographic tendencies, the majority flocked to North America in the early 21st century. The United States was a primary target for their aggression when the war broke out. The impact of such horrendous circumstances cannot be described adequately. Yet, as severe as the war's effects were on the United States, two key events proved to be the nation's ultimate downfall.

The Blight

Calvert Wycoff was raised a fundamentalist Christian. After his Aberrant powers manifested, he gathered a circle of followers called the Prophets of Jehovah. From an armed camp in Hastings, Nebraska, they preached the "word of God" as spoken through "His new Son," Wycoff.

The Prophets blared their apocalyptic message across local OpNet, radio and TV frequencies, foretelling the destruction of the world, the death of this "Gomorrah nation at the hands of the Son," and his triumphant return a century afterward, "leading the very hosts of Heaven." Citing egregious violations of FCC regulations as well as suspected weapons violations, the FBI moved into the Prophets' compound only a few weeks later.

Minutes into the raid, Wycoff literally exploded in a blaze of glory that swept the heart of North America for two hundred kilometers in every direction. The burst itself was recorded as some sort of plasma energy. Reports asserted that an another wave of unidentified energy washed over roughly another thousand kilometers. However, since the secondary effect caused no immediate death or property damage, it was disregarded.

The instantaneous deaths of those in the blast zone, and the loss of hundreds of millions of American dollars in resources shocked the world. However, the long-term effects of the Hastings explosion didn't become apparent until months afterward. Despite calls for an investigation into the government's role in the disaster, the FBI insisted that its field agents acted independently when they raided the Prophets' compound.

By early 2055 it was obvious that the Hastings blast had a more sinister effect — what became known as the blight. Crops wouldn't grow in ground exposed to Wycoff's strange secondary wave. Even worse, major strains of contemporary high-yield soy and wheat would not germinate in any North American soil. Questions remain even today: Was this some secret plot of Wycoff's? Was it the work of other Aberrants who channeled his death throes? Was it simply an unforeseen side effect of his death? Whatever the answers, the blight's effects were horrific. Fear and starvation swept the land as the nation scrambled to replenish its depleted food reserves. Meanwhile, other Aberrants continued laying waste to urban centers and the countryside.

Only paranoia seemed to grow in this new climate. Americans became suspicious of each other; splinter groups, however harmless, were soon the targets of vid exposés. Ordinary neighbors accused one another of harboring Aberrants. The freedom of religion clauses in the Bill of Rights were suspended temporarily by a cult-obsessed president.

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

Re: The Prophets of Jehovah
From: S. Helbig, FBI Director
To: C. Barnett, Omaha Office
Date: 23:31 2 NOV 2054

Having spoken to my superiors over the last several hours, we have approved a raid on the Hastings compound. You are hereby authorized to use any means necessary to bring Wycoff into custody, as of 00:00 3 NOV 2054.

Good luck, Collin.

The Rise of the Military-Corporate Complex

The United States was in poor condition. Most of its urban centers suffered severe damage from Aberrant attacks, and millions of civilians were dead. The country's resources were stretched to the breaking point; losing a massive amount of grain reserves to the blight (not to mention the inability to grow more) rocked what was left of the nation's stability. The only things acting in the military's favor in the ongoing war were the few OMEN fusion "death-sats" that hadn't been destroyed in the Aberrant "Space Brigade's" raid on Olympus Base, and the sheer size of the armed forces.

Without a strong federal government, and without the support of state governments that already struggled to feed and provide for civilians, the U.S. military declared independence from all political bodies. The armed forces assumed control of American defenses and declared authority to commandeer whatever funds and resources it needed to continue the fight against the Aberrants. Politicians were outraged, but the American people supported the uprising after the military proved that it could seize food reserves and distribute them among civilians — and fulfill the military's own needs.

The armed forces drew up unofficial boundaries, creating military management districts that each encompassed several states. Regional forces cooperated with each other and shared resources whenever possible, but otherwise acted independently, in defiance of shrill political protest.

The new military establishment moved on Canada and Mexico as one of its first actions. The United States hoped to take control of the bordering nations' marginally healthier resources. While the United States' military hardware had mixed results against the Aberrants, it was fully effective against the country's neighbors. These invasions would have been even more challenging had Quebec not assisted the United States' thrust into Canada. The North American Police Action instigated revolts, revolutions and coups across the continent that endured for decades after the war itself.

After five years and incalculable devastation to the continent, a taxed United States military finally consolidated with a few private cor-

The Dustbowl Returns

—Henry Jasper, Iowa pork farmer, interviewed for *Global News: Investigative Reports* © 5.23.2056 GN

To do your work, you need a full stomach. For a full stomach, you need a plate of meat. For a plate of meat, you need a pig. All the damned pigs are dead, and even if they weren't, we've got nothing to feed them!

One Nation Under God

— Askani Sere, *The New World* © 2093 Walkabout Press

Lest you think the nation has devolved into some pathetic post-apocalyptic cliché, let me tell you something: The federal government still exists! That surprises a lot of Americans these days. True, it's mostly all collapsed now; it serves as little more than a puppet for the metanationals. Only one remnant retains any real power: the military. The Federated States Military provides most levels of law enforcement, from county sheriff to coast guard. The FSM is ever-present — on contract, of course. Don't let a fed hear you use the word "extortion," unless you'd like to be pressed into garrison duty in Omaha.

porations to maintain control and fund the ongoing war effort. The formerly blurred divisions of the nation were now made absolute. This new "military-corporate complex" redirected funding on all government levels to rebuild the country's offensive and defensive capabilities. Legal and moral considerations aside, not even this boost allowed the military to contend with the Aberrants fully. If not for China's Ultimatum, it is difficult to say what dark fate would have befallen North America.

The Federated States of America

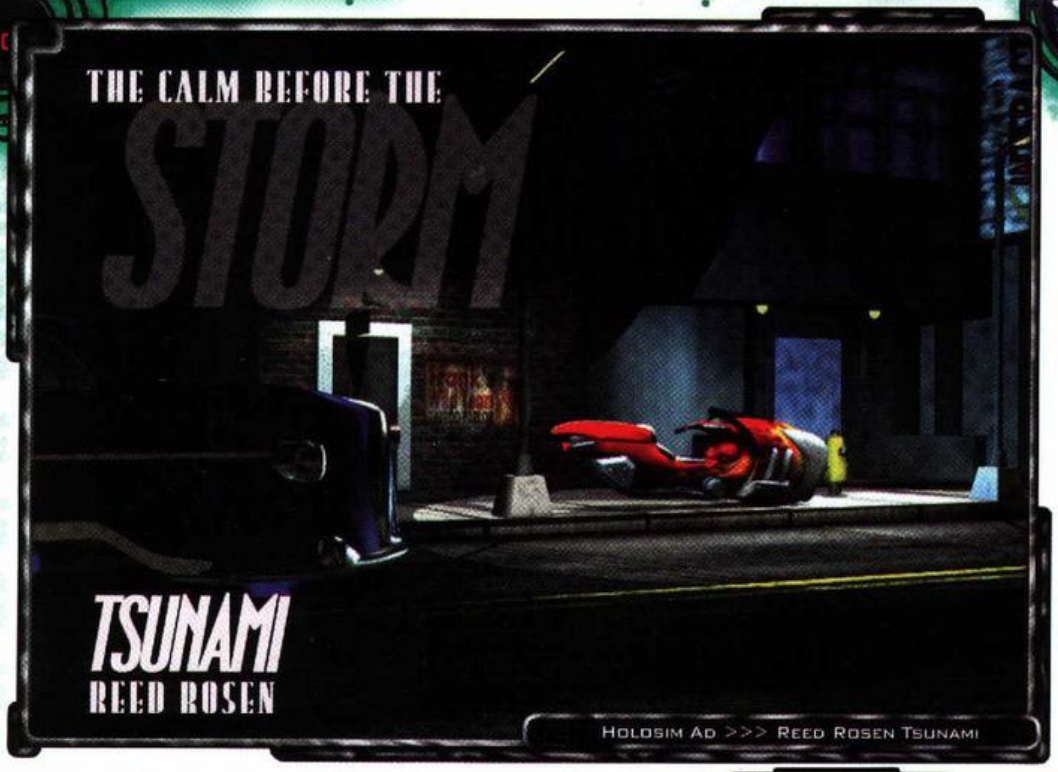
The new Federated States of America was still crippled severely by a lack of agricultural resources in the war's aftermath, and other nations were too preoccupied with their own restoration to provide assistance. Americans are nothing if not resourceful, however. While major wheat and soy strains were dead, experiments proved that other strains could be used. Continued lunar development yielded viable mineral resources and the millions of American homeless and destitute made prime colonization fodder for Luna, Mars and the asteroid belt. The once great nation struggled gamely through the waning years of the 21st century to recover its position of global supremacy.

Considering the FSA's current state, this effort will be difficult to say the least. The Federated States still retains a certain coherence; its citizens are all Americans, at least officially. Yet a deep mistrust exists among the great metro-plexes of the East and West Coasts and the "Outback" lands across what remains of North America.

Massive arcol-ogies rule North America's coasts: from Boston to Atlanta in the east, and from Vancouver to San Diego in the west. These metroplexes loom, brooding like concrete and orbital steel giants. Aircrafts and spaceships frequent the skies over the cities; the lights never go out and the commercials never stop broadcasting.

The great metanational corporations, in league with the restructured Federated States Military, still rule the land — but not in name, of course. There's no reason for the corporations to dirty their hands with the work of governing. They leave that to the skeletal federal government. The military-corporate complexes own the great arcologies in which the masters of the metro-plexes dwell, and, by extrapolation, control the very nation. No one owns — or cares to own — the crumbling shanty wastelands surrounding those shining arcologies.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM



HOLOSIM AD >>> REED ROSEN TSUNAMI

Great Lakes District, South District, Tex-Mex District, these are the North American breadbaskets of the 22nd century. Cities like Pittsburgh and Denver have seen a resurgence in trade since the war. Farming remains unsafe; the threat of attack looms for many rurals. The blight displaced a lot of those whom it didn't starve to death; thousands escaped to the FSA's many orbital colonies, or emigrated to Australia. Some of those who remained and survived now roam the land like migrant tribes, crossing the central wasteland to trade for supplies or to scavenge abandoned cities. Rumor has it that rare groups of these rurals patrol the wastelands to aid travelers in danger.

The corporations and the FSM work hand in glove on both coasts. Military production contracts go to the corporations with the largest military presence in "their" cities; the corporations round up cheap labor in the slums around the arcologies or, if they get desperate, from among the rurals. Such acts are overlooked by the federal government.

· CONFIDENTIAL ·

ANALYSIS: POST-WAR RECOVERY UPDATE 2096: THE FSA

While the country gives the impression of a land on the rebound, statistics and evidence give our economists fits. There's more work to be had in the fertile lands than there are reliable farm workers. Heavy industry is seeing its fourth consecutive rise in output. And yet the FSA's official GNP continues to slide; the dollar buys less each year, and thousands starve in the ring-towns of the arcologies. If production is so high, where is the food and money going? Our contacts in the metanational corporations indicate that a fair amount of resources go to the corps and the FSM — but not enough to account for this discrepancy. North America should be in much better financial shape than is evident. So again, the question must be asked: Where is it all going?

Quebec

When the FSA invaded Canada, Quebec backed the effort. The province's alliance with the Federated States was key to the northern conflict. Quebec was allowed to remain independent of the FSA, as a reward.

Quebec has little political clout in the 22nd century, siding with the FSA in most matters. Considering Quebec's behavior in the years since the North American Police Action, the Trinity wonders at how independent the nation really is.

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

Subject: Continued FSM Negotiations
From: Assistant Director R. DuBois, Department of Foreign Affairs, Montreal
To: Deputy Director J. Cartier, DFA, Quebec Orbital
Encryption: DSE
Transmission type: textfile (translation from the French)
Date: 13:41:33 10.16.2119

I spoke with General Johnson again this morning. Jacques, this situation is impossible. The treaty your people negotiated in 2055 — before my time, remember — guaranteed our sovereignty after the invasion of the western provinces, didn't it?

If it did, why are General Johnson and her aides citing provisions of the treaty that I have never seen before, and insisting that they retain the right to an airbase outside of Rouyn? Are there provisions to the treaty that I'm not cleared for? If so, why the hell do you people have me coordinating the negotiations?

Please contact me at once.

Mexico

Mexico City is a smoking hole in the ground. A quake hit in 2043 (an act claimed by at least a dozen Aberrants), and a schism among Aberrant factions not long afterward did millions of yuan more in damages. At least one million people died during this time; the rest fled for rural lands. The national government collapsed not long afterward, owing to a combination of incredible official corruption and crushing national debt. When the United States moved down from the north, it met with little organized resistance.

Much of Mexico is considered contested; the north along the Rio Grande has been merged with Texas, and the Gulf Coast is petitioning for FSA membership. Southern and central Mexico are a battleground between FSM troops, so-called freedom fighters, and Brazilian-financed mercenaries. Apparently the FSM seeks to secure as much arable land as possible. The resistance claims to fight for an independent Mexico. The mercenaries' goals are unknown.

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

Subject: Border Resistance
From: Colonel Theodore Whitman, FSM Tactical Analysis Division
To: Brigadier General Samson Fourke, FSM Central Command
Encryption: DSE
Transmission type: holofile [enclosed textfiles]
Date: 20:07:56 2.04.20

Regarding the continued resistance our great nation faces to the north and south: I've studied the enclosed field reports extensively, and I must admit some consternation. While the Canadian resistance movement offers little direct threat to our nation's stability, it is frustrating that such poorly-equipped rabble can resist our military forays. Even when we find their hideouts, the Canucks scatter like cockroaches when you turn on the lights. I don't know how they can keep going, considering they have no resources or support.

This leads me to the so-called "Mexican freedom fighters." Unlike their northern counterparts, these rebels are well-funded and -organized. We know they receive munitions and mercenary support from South America, and our commanders note suspected Norça involvement as well. Due to the recent setbacks we've suffered in the southern border conflict, I recommend we deploy two divisions of personal heavy assault and reconaissance gear immediately.

SOUTH AMERICA

Not even the Spanish *conquistadors* with their visions of El Dorado could have predicted the fortune to be had in the South America of the 22nd century. When America's fertile farmland was decimated by Calvert Wycoff's dramatic suicide, South America closed its continental borders and its governments exiled most foreigners in a great exodus. Only minimal international trade and communication was maintained. The "Necessary Wall" spawned discontent with governments' policies, but martial law silenced all dissension.

When South America reestablished economic contact in 2073, it opened like an oyster with pearls of agricultural produce, bulk natural resources and surplus power. As foreign money flooded into the continent, tourist havens on the verge of ruin blossomed like never before, desolate city-states began construction of the most lavish spaceports on Earth, and new megalopolises became centers for international business and pleasure. South America came into its own with fine tailored suits *en Brazilia*, hand-rolled cigars, and a white-toothed smile that gleamed like orbital steel.

Natural Wealth

Nature is power in the 22nd century. South America delights in being the leading nation on the commodities market. Brazil has its finger on the pulse of the UAN, China and Nippon, while tightening its grip on the FSA, Russia and Italy, and saving special "trade tariffs" for Portugal and Spain, its former masters.

Yet South America struggled with second-class international status well into the 21st century. The Aberrant War did not enable the continent to join the rest of the world as much as the war brought other countries down to South America's level. However, the foreign catastrophies of the Aberrant War made South America's natural resources a vital commodity, even something worth fighting over.

Furthermore, before the Aberrants left Earth, *Bandeirante*-led "hunters" swarmed the South American jungles, purging those Aberrants who hid from radar and satellite scans, and making the fertile lands safe. These turns of events redefined the world's concept of progress, began the "environmentally anxious" era, and made South America a green gem to be coveted.

South America has made its natural resources an industry unto themselves. Anti-development factions in Bolivia and the Mapuche Nation, for-

a new look for a new world

ART ©2120 KOSTBAAR

merly Chile, were instrumental in returning these nations' farmlands to their natural state. Rainforests encroach to the edge of their cities, evidence of a dramatic change in philosophy from previous centuries. Indigenous Environmental Replication Projects (IER) have been instituted by Brazil to enhance the tropical ecosystem. Even terraforming projects are underway to turn more land into rain forest. The Brazilians expect to recreate entire ecosystems with existing square kilometers as templates. Combined with the latest discoveries in biotechnology, these efforts will still not see results for decades.

Agricultural industry is not the only motivation for South America's reforms. The Aberrant War, the Crash, depression and poverty took their toll on humanity. Worldwide demand for medicinal and recreational drugs is at an all-time high.

Drug trade flourishes again due to the psi orders. Millions of neutrals are inspired to unlock the natural psionic potential within them through whatever means possible, drugs being the most likely route. South America's legalization of the drug trade transformed drug-lords into businessmen, cartels into metanationals.

The Norça are known to support drug trade and development. There are even rumors that Proxy del Fuego himself condones the testing of drugs that induce perception of the subquantum universe. What the order might have planned for such research is unknown, and details are sketchy as to how extreme and humane this testing may be. Neither the Æon Trinity nor the other orders have yet to respond to these allegations.

Space Development

The space race has had little appeal for South America. The continent focused instead on the global Motherland — home. The South American orbital station *Orgulho de Cèu* was built more as a symbol of wealth and power than out of any true need. Today it serves as a scientific laboratory for bio-

Mourning Is Over

— Dazyl Grenich, *Lifestyles* © 1.6.2120 MMI

Fashion designer and Dutch émigré Kostbaar declared today that mourning is over. Five years is enough, he says, so no more black, no more *faux* French berets. It's time for fashion to move forward again, in the new, bright, Brazilian monofiber fabrics and clever body-shaping cuts that are all the rage in *haute couture* this season. Kostbaar says his new look hits the ramps in Rio this spring. See the holos here first!

chemical and genetic engineering. Colombian research crews are busy analyzing samples from Titan and Europa. They hope to splice these orbital strains onto existing South American agro-genetic chains, further advancing South American biotechnology.

Politics

The "official" South American governments can best be described as decentralized. Discounting the *indÌgena* nations, old rivalries and new prosperity has created a winner-takes-all attitude among the arcologies.

Brazil remains the superpower in the public arena, although the growing influence of Candomble (the largest African-Brazilian cult in South America) makes Papal State supporters increasingly uncomfortable. Columbia and Brazil vie for control behind the scenes, with no one group firmly in control. Medellìn druglords and officials have devoted masses in the FSA, among the youth of Russia, in the Balkans and in the Turk Federation. Colombian and Brazilian coastal cartels are in league with other organized crime families in Italy, Israel and in the Russian intelligence agency.

However, many concede that the Norça most likely control it all, including determining access to, and flow of, the latest South American discoveries in biochemical and genetics research throughout the UAN and China. In any case, South American politics pander to vain and vengeful demands, and no deal is signed without someone getting a cut.

Brazil

Brazil is the Western Hemisphere's center for environmental biotechnology, biosphere stabilization and biochemical research. The country consists of five arcology districts: the Pantanal, including the mines of Minas Gerais; the Mato Grosso; Rio de Janeiro; São Paulo; and Salvador. Over 90 million poor live in a squalid buffer zone between these glorious arcologies, and these destitute must contend with the rain forests that still hold secrets from modern science.

There is a place for everyone in Brazil, and each region has its own stereotypical flavor. The *Cariocas* of Rio are hedonistic, frivolous and irresponsible pleasure-lovers. The *Paulistas* of São Paulo are upwardly mobile, materialistic, neurotic work-aholics. The *Mineiros* of Minas Gerais are thrifty, clever business-people with an extremely religious nature. The quiet, unassuming *Nordistos* of the northern regions lead gentle and simple lives in their neo-ecoculture.

The Pantanal was the source of biotemplates in Norça's first foray into ecological recovery. The feral and dangerous beauty of the region is preserved because of its unique biochemistry...and because the Norça insist on it.

Minas Gerais traffics coveted bacterial templates and black-market biotechnology. Biosamples are gathered by incursion units of every stripe and inclination. These teams are easy to recognize: three to five heavily armed guards, at least one *mestizo* or native scout, and perhaps a handful of serious-looking strangers whose *burros* and small terrarovers are packed with handling equipment and cryotubes. These agrotechs plunge into the deltas, hoping to emerge with enough base material to boost the depleted ecology of any nation willing to pay the price.

Candomble

What was once a dance in honor of the gods is now the largest African-Brazilian religious cult in South America, and the governing power of the pious in Brazil. The *Pai* or *Mae de Santo* chant and weave their prayers in solemn, entrancing tones while wearing soft white. They throw *buzios* to interpret their fortunes or futures, or to explore their past lives with the gods. The shells splay all-knowing patterns in the swept dirt of a floor. *Jogo dos Buzios* is a serious force of power and only

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

ADDICTION AND PROMOTION, THE INSTITUTIONALIZED HIGHS OF SÃO PAULO

— Excerpt: Maria-Theresa San Dios' Univeristy of Pharmacology Thesis, 2116

You won't find anything illicit on the streets of São Paulo. The walkways are clean, the roads are well-kept, and everyone is either going to or returning from work. No one dallies. Now in the business meetings, well, that's another story...Apoderado's the only place I've worked where no one leaves the office or the gym without a guaranteed smile on his face, and it's *not* always from the overtime pay!

The Power of Candomble

— Excerpt: *Wakina Sisi* holomag © 2119 Genman Enterprises

"I quoted a proverb. They were overcome with laughter at these words."

This was 79-year-old Ãy Nika's simple defense against the accusation that she used her position of Mai de Santos to bring evil *id·n* (magic) against the two youths who tried to rob her. The young men fell ill of a rare wasting disease — the only two cases recorded in Brazil since 1822 — within three days of the incident. The families of the men have brought suit against Ãy Nika and her congregation. Her defense counsel is financed by individual donations that, at last count, total 370 million new yuan.

the foolhardy would laugh at the telling, or insult the Spirit Parent who gives it.

Argentina

Argentina is all business. Such business is primarily in guerrilla warfare and "dirty wars" among North and South American political factions, religious cults and special interest groups. Argentina is busiest in its own backyard, due to the fascist regime that divides the nation into the very rich and very, very poor.

In contrast to its crooked and criminal politics, Argentina is the stage for South American theatrics. Carnival's feverish ecstasy of color and motion, the multilingual bartertown *centros'* loud and frenzied haggling, and the aggressive tourism trade bring a gritty glamour to Argentina.

Colombia

The Colombian Supreme Court's legalization of personal drugs in the mid-1990s transformed illicit drug trade into big business. Colombia is the undisputed system leader in drug trade, with the nation's capital, Medellîn, the most advanced pharmaceutical center in settled space. Experiments performed with a wide array of drugs on hundreds of willing human subjects advanced medicinal science exponentially. The city's research teams at the University of Pharmacology are now decades ahead of their Chinese competitors. Medellîn's poorest quarters house hundreds of test subjects who are the "dreamers" in the cast-off "Den of Dreams."

Peru

Most of Peru went the way of Chile and Bolivia after the Aberrant War: back to ancestral traditions. Peru's government and trade capital, Lima, sprawls under a thick shroud of mist. The port city trades in one of the richest commodities known to man: information. When information is relayed to western South American, it comes through Lima, but without the expenses demanded in Brazil or Colombia. No holotransmis-sions or coded flat texts here, only quiet hearsay traded person-to-person from aquatic ship captains to foreign datathieves.

Venezuela

Venezuela struggled during the 21st century, subjected to harsh Aberrant attacks that culminated in germ warfare. The country was quietly shunned thereafter, and gained the nickname *El Capybara*, after the infested rodents that lived in its nearby jungle. Venezuela didn't shed its reputation until the Norça helped establish underwater cities off its coast. These small realms spread into the Caribbean, contained within translucent bubbles of enforced orbital polymers, lie suspended between ocean bottom and island stalk.

A variety of occupations are available here: oceanic biology, deep-sea tourism and farming, intermediary grav training for space flight, and on-site security. Oceanic patrols are the first line of defense for local land and water cities, and keep vigilant watch for Aberrant lifeforms that might roam the watery depths.

Danger in Paradise

— Excerpt: *Travel South America: 2115*
© 2115 Stahu Entertainment

Fair warning to all entrepreneurs: The Colombian *juntas* have every intention of keeping the wealth of Columbia *inside* Columbia. Armed militiamen are everyday fixtures and have no qualms about shooting suspected traffickers of appropriated merchandise. Although South American law forbids unnecessary violence without proof of criminal intent, such actions are classified as in "national defense." If you are one of the truly unlucky, you may be beaten, drugged and released in squalid Communa Noroccidental to find your own way out or, even worse, you may be discovered by Norça biokenetics and never heard from again.

SPACE

Humanity has wondered at the stars since before the dawn of history. Our achievements in venturing into space are therefore relatively recent accomplishments in our development.

Initial forays into orbit began in the 20th century. But those successes were only stepping stones to the strides of the 21st century, when humanity created new energy sources, developed new technologies and finally walked among the solar system's planets. It's impossible to guess at the progress that we would have made in our solar system and beyond had the Aberrant War not erupted. Most of Earth's space program shuddered to a halt due to the depredations of the Aberrants.

And yet as history has proven repeatedly, adversity inspires humanity. The Chinese people performed Herculean feats in launching numerous space craft and weapons platforms during the war. Not only did China's successes in space put an end to the fighting, it rid Earth of the Aberrant threat, if only for a short while. However, China's achievements also marked the dawn of a new space age, a beginning of a new dream to walk among the stars.

And the humans of the 22nd century do exactly that. Earth is no longer our only home. People reside in near orbit, throughout our solar system, and in the vast reaches of space.

Certainly, scientific discoveries have allowed these achievements, but the evolution of human's psionic potential has truly made the colonization of space possible. The rise of the orders and the psions, the discovery of the subquantum energy that resonates throughout the universe, and the invention of biotechnology has led to developments in space exploration never dreamed of before. We have touched alien soil and become the friends of alien races. The psions are indeed Earth's pathfinders to the stars...or they were.

Now that the teleporting Upeo wa Macho are gone, humanity's dreams of spacefaring have been shattered. Colonies established in deep space are stranded, and have been so for five years. No one can guess what has happened to them, or if they have even survived. With the return of the Aberrants and the unexpected appearance of the hostile

Life on the Fringe

— Stephanie Chan, *The Final Frontier* © 2118 GN

In many ways, life in extraterrestrial colonies, stations and bases can be compared to that on any new frontier, in any era of human history. Eking out a living in an unknown environment demands resilience, a rugged physique and cooperation. But the worlds that space explorers struggle to conquer go beyond the hair-trigger life of Tombstone or the dangers of staking a claim. Justice in space is swift and harsh. When you run out of food, there's nowhere to forage. When things go bad, there's no way to pick up and start elsewhere. And when your enemies come, there's no place to hide.

A harsh environment creates harsh people, but tolerance, grace and subtlety are in greater demand in space than anywhere else. Is it worthwhile to get angry over a game of cards, or a work schedule, or even a mate? Killing is easy — anyone can do it and get away with it on the frontier — so why look for trouble? Forgive and live.

In space, you depend on the competence of those around you. Highly screened and trained crews are the dream of every supervisor; a single screw up could kill everyone. Since life-support environments are at a premium, limiting privacy off Earth, a little personal space can be worth killing for. But whether people are miners, terraformers or researchers, living space is minimal compared to the vastness of space, and everyone better get along or *someone's* going to die!

The complexity of life follows the complexity of technology, and those who live in space are entirely dependent on their technology. Pioneering in the 22nd century is no return to "the simple life," unless you mean that it's simply *harder*.

Chromatics, it doesn't seem likely that our orphaned peoples still thrive out there alone.

Only the near future will reveal the truth. The remaining psions, working with Qin allies trapped with us, have created new, "living" ships capable of returning to deep space. The glory days of the Upeo may be with us again, even if the teleporters themselves are not. We will return to our lost colonies, rescue our people, return our alien ambassadors home, broaden the frontiers of known space and finally confront the forces that menace us on their own turf.

The Æon Trinity and the Orders

Almost all of the orders have some presence in space, whether public or not. The Æon Trinity also has extraterrestrial facilities, which are accessible to normals and psions alike.

Æsculapians' activities in space are perhaps the most public and widely recognized of all the orders'. The docs operate a variety of clinics in all lunar sectors, in every colony and on every publicly held orbital station. The vitakinetics provide medical attention to colonists, from tending to injuries, curing illnesses, providing psychological treatment and stress therapy, to trying to eliminate the sale of black-market organs and controlling drug trade (both legal and illicit). The Æsculapians are needed most in Luna's Downside, where workers and the indigent suffer frequent "accidents," and overdose regularly on the drugs they turn to in hopes of a brighter existence.

The low-gravity environment in space also allows Æsculapians to conduct medical research, particularly on new medications that cannot be manufactured on Earth. Luna's Æsculapian clinics are a major source of medical treatment and psionic healing throughout colonized space.

ISRA is based on the Moon. What better place than Luna, the clairsentients reason, is there to look out across the stars and protect the Earth? Although the order is based here, it is not a major influence on lunar society or a factor in lunar events. The order's impact has increased recently due to the jumpship program. The clairsentients' powers allow them to interact with the new biotech jump ships, and Luna is the staging area for humanity's return to deep space. Although most ISRAns call Luna home, Proxy Otha Herzog lives on a space station far from human habitation *and* his psions.

The Legions are the orders' contribution to security in space.

The Milky Way on ¥20 a Day

— *Travelogue* special issue © 2119 Rafat, Inc.

In wealthy arcologies and on orbital-station decks, most consumer goods are paid for simply by identifying yourself to the cashier (who may be a computer agent in some stores). Voiceprint and thumbprint are scanned, checked against your bank records, and the cost is automatically deducted from your account.

In less affluent areas on Earth and in most of the inner colonies, old-fashioned hard currency and credit cards still hold sway. This is due in large part to the exorbitant fees and effort involved in accessing approved OpNet financial nodes. Most colonies also have multinational presences — Olympus alone has over a dozen major national outposts. Add to these issues a number of petty fees and concerns, and most businesses find it easier to rely on tried-and-true hard currency, trade and sometimes even barter. Apparently the Belt's a purely barter-system economy; all the credit in the universe won't even buy you a drink.

Setting up a bank account doesn't change much whether you're in Zurich-Geneva or in a Lunar colony spur. You simply present yourself at a branch office. They take a voiceprint and retinal scan and check them against the databases they have access to. As long as you prove to be who you say you are, you can open an account, transfer funds or do whatever your heart desires. The usual interest rate for loans is 3% if you're in the black, 20% if you're in the red. Banks that offer "more privacy" (meaning they aren't as concerned about your identity) are available, but their interest rates are high, and their fees are exorbitant.

As Luna is the hub of the human universe, so too is it the hub of Legion activities beyond Earth. Perhaps the best known of the psychokinetics on the Moon is Phoenix Squadron. Legionnaires also provide security for the various sectors of Olympus itself, dealing with unruly colonists and protecting the base from foreign incursions. More than one rowdy miner has suffered abuse at the hands (and psionic powers) of psychokinetics bored with their "chicken roost" duties. The Legions maintain several military barracks and ship-launch sites on Luna.

The Ministry maintains telepaths on all publicly held orbital stations and colonies at all times. It also staffs liaisons to Chinese delegates to the lunar-based new United Nations. The high Chinese population in the stars also demands telepath presence simply to ensure respect for the earthly Chinese government's doctrines, and to protect China's interests in space. The Ministry's space outpost is located in Yutu Yinchan on Luna, but isn't recognizable unto itself against the backdrop of diplomatic and business institutions that pervade the sector.

The Norça maintain no official bases or operatives in space. Biokinetics have been spotted (or evidence of their passing has been found) in Olympus, in the Belt and on a number of orbital stations, though. Norça activities in space have almost always been limited to the lower levels of stations and fringes of colonies, with the psions disappearing as quickly as they have appeared. Officially, Norça agents claim that their activities in space involve acting against threats that the other orders overlook, but the order refuses to elaborate.

Orgotek maintains research centers throughout settled space, which are operated by both normal and psion agents. These facilities are located on every major orbital station in the solar system and in the colonies on Luna and Mars. Tests are conducted on biotech and psionic powers to gauge their capacities in low-gravity environments, and to expand noetic science.

Orgotek agents and psions are crucial to the development of jumpships. The orbital jumpship launch platform was destroyed in the 2119 Aberrant attack, led by the The Colony. Hundreds of psions and Orgotek employees were killed in the assault. The program was thought grievously delayed until Orgotek proxy Alex Cassel revealed a second such site on Luna, created, maintained and kept secret exclusively by Orgotek all along.

The Æon Trinity itself operates a variety of extraterrestrial outposts. Some are public facilities on Luna or orbital stations that can be located by anyone. Public offices provide services ranging from information libraries to medical clinics to social programs (the last two of which are most prevalent in the safer regions in Luna's Downside). Psions are posted to these public facilities occasionally, but mostly for appearances sake or as penalty for abuses of power or breaches of conduct.

Private outposts are the center of Æon Trinity action in space. Æon maintains a variety of chapters on Luna that coordinate numerous activities throughout human-occupied territories. Housing for psion and neutral space explorers, noetic science experimental labs, weapons-testing sites, Aberrant surveys and space patrols fall under this purview. The Trinity's space personnel are also instrumental to the jump-ship program, and was primarily responsible for building the orbital station that was destroyed in the 2119 Aberrant attack. Those tests continue even now in the "second" launch site, recently revealed to the Trinity by Orgotek.

LUNA

Sun	Sol
Sun's spectral type	G2
Mass (Earth = 1)	0.012
Equatorial diameter (km)	3,476
Gravity (Earth = 1)	0.17
Atmosphere	none
Indigenous life	none
Rotation period	29.5 days
Closest distance to Earth	356,400 km
Primary satellites	none

In the early 21st century, the United States space program turned its attention to Earth's closest neighbor, Luna. Astronomers searched for an appropriate site for a lunar base. They settled on a small crater near the south pole, which contained a frozen lake called Galatea. Sheltered in the shadow of the high walls of the selenic scar, the lake was protected from the sun's blazing heat, making it an invaluable resource in lunar development.

The U.S. began Earth-side construction of the base, Olympus (also called the Mount), in 2015, but it took NASA architects, astronauts and administration 15 years to launch the first lunar construction mission. On March 18, 2031, Olympus was christened, and ushered in a new age of space exploration and research.

Lunar mining was central to Olympus' funding for its first decade. In time, however, expansions on the base demanded that mining and water-processing facilities be enlarged as well. The station's landing plain was also turned into a full-fledged space "dock," catering to a steady stream of traffic to and from Earth as new inhabitants arrived and itinerants returned home. Families were even created on the base, and the U.S. government finally began to refer to Olympus as a "colony" rather than a "project."

Olympus wasn't the world's only lunar project. In 2045, Britain proudly unveiled its own base, Camelot, located to the south of Olympus, on the shore of Galatea. Russia also announced its Yeltsingrad base, just across Luna's shadow line. Yeltsingrad, located on a small crater-lake, was never intended to be anything more than a mining operation, while Camelot was a shining monument to technology.

When tensions between humans and Aberrants rose back on Earth, all three lunar bases were left woefully understaffed and undersupplied. Olympus doled out resources and aid whenever possible. Yeltsingrad suffered considerably more than Camelot did because of its distance from Olympus and because the limited funding available to construct the base resulted in a rudimentary facility.

When lunar inhabitants got word of the United Nations' declaration of war against the Aberrants in 2049, most were relieved that they were isolated on the Moon, and spared the conflict. They worried, of course, about their friends and families back home, and shuddered sympathetically each time they received news of another Aberrant atrocity.

Only a few months later, the war came to them.

A Famous Person I Admire

— Amani Pandarapandi, age 8, Chandi School for Girls, Calcutta, India, interviewed for *Lifestyles* © 2118 MMI

I admire Selene Olympia Miller most of anyone in the world. She was the very first baby born on the Moon. Her first name is for a moon goddess of Greece, and her middle name is for the base named Olympus. She was born on June 16, 2034, and lots of newspapers wrote stories about how much she weighed and how much hair she had. When she was 15, she helped a bunch of people when the Space Brigade came to the Moon and took it over. Because she played in the tunnels, she knew all the hiding places, and they all went with her, even the grown-ups. And because she knew how to hide really good, they all stayed safe, even though bad people were blowing up things on Earth.

The Aberrant Takeover

Aberrants stormed Olympus without warning. A horde of mutants appeared out of nowhere — apparently using the bizarre "warp" ability — and swarmed through the base, demanding surrender and herding the population into the control center for an introduction to the ridiculously named but militarily precise "Space Brigade." The takeover resulted in 12 casualties and about 17 billion dollars in damage. Most of the deaths occurred in short melees, though some resulted from misunderstandings. After Olympus was secure, a small group of invaders detached to disable the British base, and returned with all remaining Camelot personnel.

After destroying many of the OMEN "deathsats," the Aberrants repaired and augmented Olympus' weapons systems, as well as its solar, hydroponics, water-processing and manufacturing complexes. The Space Brigade declared Olympus a neutral territory — the base was a retreat for humans and Aberrants alike who could reach the place. Residents were never allowed to leave, however. Key Space Brigade members transported mined ores and scavenged technologies to purchase necessary supplies from Earth's black markets.

Residents lived comfortably, if not amiably, together. Even so, a number of the human crew departed willingly with the Aberrants in 2061, having forged friendships and relationships.

The years under Aberrant rule doomed Olympus residents. Crewmembers' muscles weakened and bones thinned due to Luna's low gravity. Returning to Earth therefore meant undergoing considerable physiological stress or even meant death. Furthermore, the calcium of crewmembers' bones diminished due to extended low-gravity existence. Lunar men and women suffered accelerated skeletal breakdown. Their expected life spans were reduced drastically and they became prone to skeletal stresses, making life agonizing. This condition came to be known as Lunar (later Low-gravity) Aggravated Osteoporosis, or LAO.

In an effort to offset these afflictions, foster programs were developed for the children (known as "elgees") of lunar gravity families. The children were raised by families ("fulgees") in the full gravity of Earth, and visited their biological families at intervals. Elgee children learned to accept the pity of fulgee adults, and to contend with the jeers of their fulgee peers.

TRITON ARCHIVE

Short-burst Laser Transmission, received by Denver Communications

From: Olympus, Moon 2060 18 Mar.

To: The relatives of S.O. Miller, ID#OL0000208

I regret to inform you that your niece, Selene Miller, passed on during childbirth 15 Mar 2060, apparently due to what our doctors now identify as LAO (see attachment). Despite the extreme measures taken by our staff, she was beyond our ability to save. Her child, a boy, is not yet named by the father. Please accept my condolences on the passing of this intrepid woman.

Sincerely,

Dave Henderson, Commander, Space Brigade

Lunar Expansion and Beyond

Not long after the Aberrants' Exodus, in keeping with a diplomatic agreement, China established a base adjoining Olympus. There was no similarity between the outposts. China based its station design on practical cubical modules with auto-sealing bulkheads, ending the romantic age of domes in favor of stackable, customizable, mobile, space-saving facilities. Yutu Yinchan was composed of cluster groups, each with its own hyper-fusion generator, water conduits, solar lines, food production and storage.

Following the U.S.-Chinese example, multinational construction efforts became increasingly common on Luna. Nippon spearheaded the creation of a solar-energy system to supplement the hyper-fusion reactors, for use by all Moon bases. The lunar population cooperated to complete the Yeltsingrad Corridor, a conduit that ran power and life-support lines to the isolated Russian facility. And in the greatest collective effort of all, the lunar colonies created Tiamat, a monstrous water-processing facility in the center of Galatea. Tiamat finally made all the lunar bases a joined, closed system.

Pseudo-gravity

— Dr. Kieran Baxter, *The Technological Age* © 2110 Walkabout Press

The relationship between a given mass and the gravitational force it exerts on other bodies is well-known. Scientists also agree that matter and energy are the same for the purposes of discussing gravitational effects. Stars lose mass as a result of the tremendous energies that they radiate, and even electrons have minuscule but mathematically determinable amounts of mass.

In 2071, gravity researchers developed a process by which energy can be converted into mass to create a kind of artificial gravity. Orbitally manufactured crystals (dubbed "grav-crystals") manifest artificial mass when fed a significant amount of energy. Grav-crystals absorb energy and radiate the equivalent gravity of much more massive objects. Although they do not actually possess high mass, grav-crystals create the *effect* of gravity over short distances.

Individual crystals (constructed to a regulation 4 cm x 1 cm) are fitted into sockets within a pseudo-graviton generating grid. Each grid is a flat panel that is one-meter-square, and six centimeters deep. Plugged into a strong power generator (such as a ship's fusion engine), the specially designed grid creates a resonance among the grav-crystals. The result is a localized hemispherical gravitational field of up to 1g projected over roughly two meters at full strength. The mass field's wave-form collapses beyond that point, not unlike a soap bubble that's blown a too large.

A ship with a grid system operating at full resonance, and that enters a gravity well (such as that of Earth or Luna), undergoes increased gravity within the craft. Grid systems have gravity compensators, or "g-comps," that regulate degree of resonance to maintain a comfortable Earth-normal 1g.

Despite what one sees on holodramas, spacecraft, orbital stations and low-gravity colonies are not blanketed with pseudo-gravity generators. Grids are precise systems that require specialized care; strong power fluctuations or system malfunctions can short them out easily. Grids are also very expensive to manufacture and maintain, and require a significant amount of energy to operate.

There are a number of circumstances under which a low- or no-gravity environment is preferable to pseudo-gravity. "No-gravity zones" are typically indicated by red-and-black-striped markers. These utility areas utilize weak local gravity to ease cargo and high-speed transport. Construction workers on extraterrestrial sites use a few portable pseudo-gravity grids (hooked into a central generator) where a gravity source is desired. Otherwise their work is facilitated by operating in low gravity. New sports and entertainment media based on low gravity have also developed.

In the decades since it was first introduced, pseudo-gravity has revolutionized space development. Yet we cannot forget the dangers inherent to space, as well as to mixing pseudo- and low-gravity environments. A situation involving a space liner that suffers a massive grid short, or an inattentive worker who steers a loaded cargo pod into a full-gravity zone could lead to calamity.

Yet, as much as Tiamat revolutionized life on Luna, nothing changed the evolving culture of the Mount as much as the development of gravcrystals did in 2071. Earth's scrounging populace no longer had to worry about the major deterrent to lunar colonization: LAO. Even though 21st-century orbital transportation was expensive, Luna's population exploded. Hydroponic farming complexes sprawled out from the urban center, tended by colonist serfs who worked for corporate and governmental barons. Mining consortiums ventured over and into the selenic crust, achieving limited independence from the lunar arcology. Olympus itself sprouted soaring towers and blocky high-rises inhabited by the affluent and iconoclastic. The rich used their tremendous wealth to urge engineers to design well-shielded yet stunning above-ground structures.

Various countries tried to snatch up some of the Mount's glory by constructing orbital stations at Earth's Lagrange points. Olympus had established itself, though, remaining the jewel in North America's tarnished and lopsided crown. The focal point for trade, colonization and success, the base acquired a romanticized reputation comparable to that of 19th-century North America. People virtually sold themselves into slavery to governments and metacorporations just to have the chance to start over, away from the post-war crowds, filth and toxic remains. In fact, as mining and research operations spread across the solar system, Olympus became increasingly important as a source of supplies, construction materials, communication relays and crews. While orbital stations were ideal for docking, resupplying and mission launches, they lacked the vast resources and defenses of the Mount. The lunar colony was better prepared to handle emergencies, general ship maintenance and to house ships' crews, provisions and payloads.

Luna firma truly became home away from home.

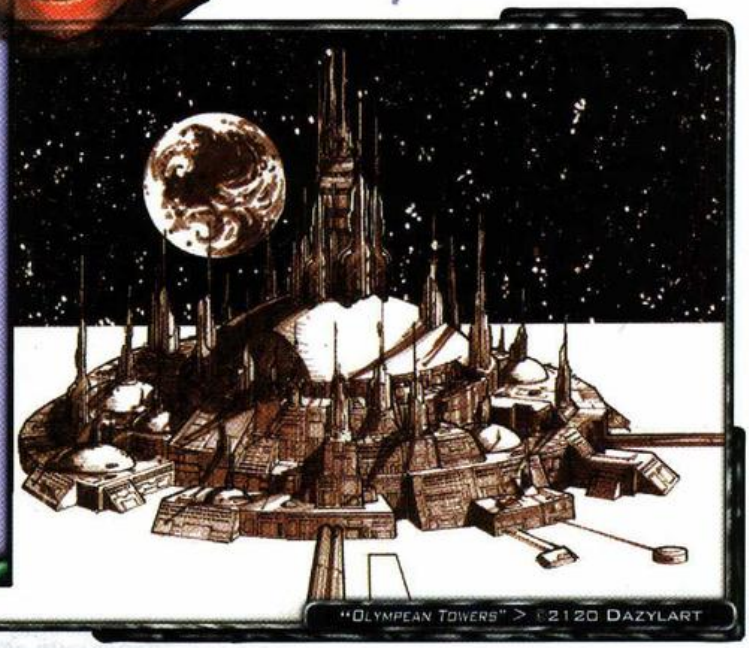
Welcome to Olympus

Luna is recognized as the hub of the solar system. While much of the Earth has been restored since the war, most of the one billion souls who left it for the stars have little desire to return — and fully half of that number make their new home on the cramped quarters of the Moon. Many miners, scientists, businessmen and colonists (the majority of them North American or European) left ravaged

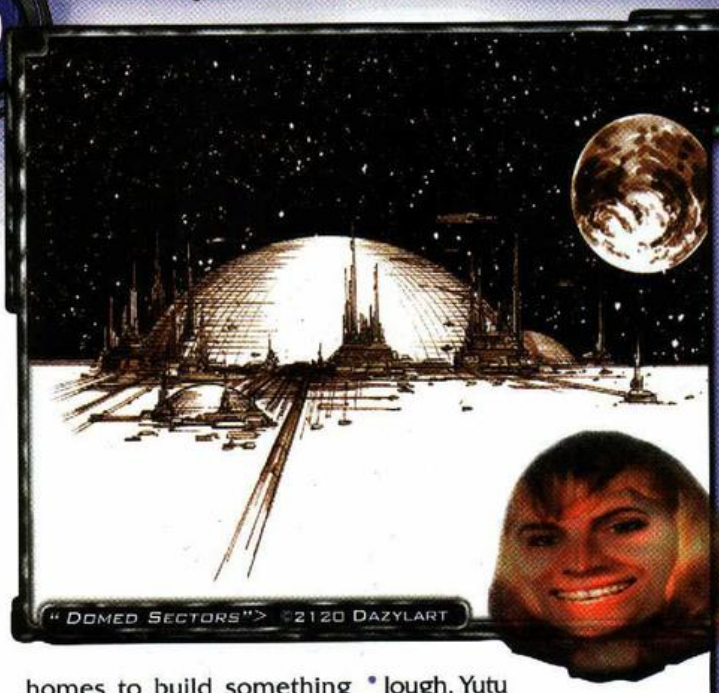
Life on Luna — Upside

— Dazyl Grenich, *Lifestyles* © 2120 MMI

We're in Crèpescule des Dietés, the finest restaurant on all of Luna (although it's surrounded by 10 other restaurants that make the same claim). We're in Yutu Yinchon's highest towers, overlooking the spaceport and its rat race. You'd be hard pressed to find a more ostentatious display of wealth here on the Moon — except, perhaps, for the Olympean Towers. Local wags claim that the Towers gleam like that because they're made of pure platinum. While that's an exaggeration, money was no object in the creation of that paradise for the affluent.



"Olympean Towers" > ©2120 Dazylart



homes to build something new. From a vantage point on Luna, Earth is but a beautiful gem in the sky.

Olympus has grown into a nation-state for the 22nd century, home to almost every aspect of space society — from the intrasolar negotiations of the new United Nations to the shadowy conferences of the black market. Corporations use Olympus as a base for trade and finance. The media uses it as the backdrop to everything from news shows to comedies to adventure programs. Even independent mining and trade operations shop their wares in the Mount's numerous markets (from "legal" to "don't ask").

The rich buy their way into the Olympean Towers' luxurious apartments, while brilliant minds flock to Ukiyoshi's technological mecca. Various regions of the Mount have acquired certain reputations: Ukiyoshi's lakeside districts are "corporate towns" consisting of modest apartments for intrasolar travelers on furlough. Yutu Yinchon's markets, night life and spacedock make it the perfect place for space travelers and Olympus residents to mingle and exchange gossip, money and contracts. Oxford University's lunar campus in Camelot has transformed the dilapidated Grail into the heart of academia for the new century.

The vast majority of lunar visitors and spacers frequent the Yutu Yinchon District. The region runs the gamut from upscale restaurants, bars and resorts to grimy, dangerous dives. The wealthy display themselves in the cultural nucleus of Bire Lubuto, paying enormous prices for tickets to Chinese and Russian operas, ballet, *kabuki* and other cultural performances.

Lejanas hosts many middle-class families. One of the Mount's biggest tourist attractions, it caters to the numerous youths housed in the region's gleaming high-rises. Luna Park is the family resort of the solar system, in much the way that Disneyland was for the United States in the 20th century.

Entertainment is central to many areas of the Mount. Most blue-collar diversions are Downside, a rough-and-tumble lakeside region that adjoins the student haunts of lunar Oxford, the corporate sectors and the Corridor. Downside bars, pool halls and bath houses are all equipped with advanced security systems to keep watch for the slightest hint of violence from workers unwinding from their high-stress jobs. A contingent of the psychokinetic order's Second Legion is on permanent retainer here, and deals courteously and efficiently with any problems that arise.

Mezzanine

— Dazyl Grenich, *Lifestyles*
© 2120 MMI

Here's a *darling* little pub for the university set. It oozes with pre-war sentiment. The wood decor is perfect for carving lovesick declarations or political dogma — often one and the same for this crowd! The entire sec is like this, brimming with pizza jinks and skating rinks, and things kids love to do with their folks' credit. Trust Oxford Camelot to *try* starting a distinguished tradition and fail miserably once all the North American academics arrive.

The Underworld

Luna's poor quickly filter down to Olympus' low levels. Only the wealthy can live high above the Moon's surface, bask-

Downside

— Dazyl Grenich, *Lifestyles* © 2120 MMI

We're a few levels down, now, in Downside — down *levels*, down *scale*, down *class*. This is the turf of blue-collar corp slaves on leave from sweaty spectra scans on Mars or Mercury. This is the Brass Knuckles — no, wait, that's down the strip. This is a *little* classier than that, but then, so is Ayvana Gar, that bastion of fashion sense (but that's another story altogether).

This is O'Flaherty's Pub, one of the busiest corp-service stations Downside. It's *big*, it's *hot* and it's full of loud, flashtemp miners. Notice the discreet holocameras in every corner — not a moment of privacy, but at least it keeps you from being crushed flat by a twitchy grunt with a chip on his shoulder. Legionnaires appear in the wink of an LED to lead boisterous laborers away with a kind word about docked R&R pay.

"Old Town" © 2120 Dazylart

ing in natural light and enjoying premier water and power supplies, protected from the dangers of cosmic radiation and vacuum by highly advanced engineering systems. The Moon's oldest structures are now covered by new construction, and are supplied essentials by their original hydro- and life-support systems. Since water is so tremendously scarce in space, it's never purged entirely at this level; most of it has been recycled millions of times — and tastes like it. The power supply frequently drops to minimal levels due to almost constant system malfunctions. Air vents back up frequently, vomiting noxious fumes and sending residents scurrying for oxygen masks.

The twisting corridors and dimly lit rooms of the underground sectors are considered the "underworld" in many senses of the word. No wise lunar resident walks here unarmed or unguarded. Negotiations that take place here are shady at best, though they may determine the fates of individuals, countries or entire worlds. From the depths of Hera, through the Corridor and into the heart of Yeltsingrad (also known as the Pit), the most despicable, feared and terrified prowl the forgotten sectors in pursuit of dark agendas.

The victims of LAO make their homes here as well, forgotten and disregarded by those who dwell in the higher levels. Although pariahs to Upside, these elgees command respect and even fear from the Underworld's fulgee residents. The low-gravity dwellers wield influence and information much desired by others, and have eked out a small but significant power base deep in the Pit.

Migrant workers, stranded and disillusioned

Law of the Wild

— Anonymous ice miner, interviewed for *The Final Frontier* © 2118 GN

Look, I can give you all the advice in the galaxy, but it all boils down to two things. The first is: The farther up you go in Olympus, the tighter the security. You can walk around the Pit with a dozen lasers strapped to you, but try that in Yutu Yinchon and you'll get thrown in the brig faster than you can spit.

The second is: It's not guns that make people dangerous.

A New Dream

— Stephanie Chan, *The Final Frontier* © 2118 GN

Luna is a mix of humanity's greatest triumphs and darkest secrets. Whatever you may be looking for or running from, you're sure to find a place on the Moon. It's a land of opportunity, where anyone can make a fortune — or lose it all. It's a symbol of humanity's future, the realization of a centuries-old dream to venture into the stars.

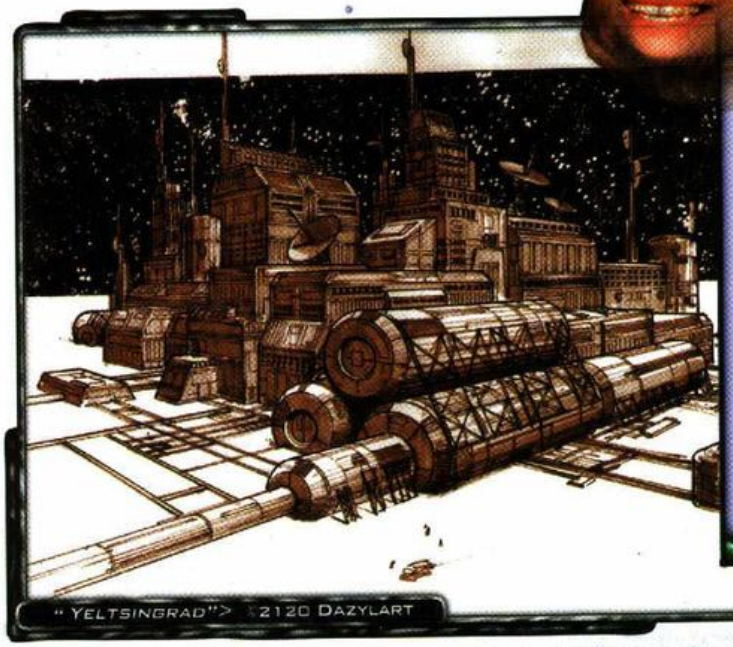
immigrants, and hard-luck cases of every variety struggle to make livings and to raise families in the Underworld's depths. Most do it without any legal pretenses. Those who want to survive align themselves with the local powers that be. The Pit is dominated by a heavy-handed dictatrix known simply as "the President." Having established herself some time ago in Yeltsingrad's command center, her clan possesses nearly supreme control of the region's life-support systems, power and limited security monitors.

The Underworld, a broad and constantly expanding area under Olympus proper, first divided along national lines. Subsequent reorganizations, murders and further realignments have made the region's political makeup even more chaotic than those above the surface. Illegal drugs, mercenaries, killers, black-market organs, sex and weapons are just a few of the commodities available here.

The Corridor isn't "prime territory" like the Pit and the Underworld are. Those sectors' principal powers leave the Corridor to less-organized bullies. This leftover region is squabbled over by a number of angry gangs, which have varying levels of power.

Lunar Business

The Mount is the center of all spaceborne commerce. Luna is the place for any company with an interest in stellar exploration or expansion. Every player in the space game has a major base of operations, if not corporate headquarters, on Luna. The most prosperous do business from splendid edifices that soar above the colony-state's commoners, and have architecture that's impossible to achieve on Earth.



"YELTSINGRAD" © 2120 DAZYLART

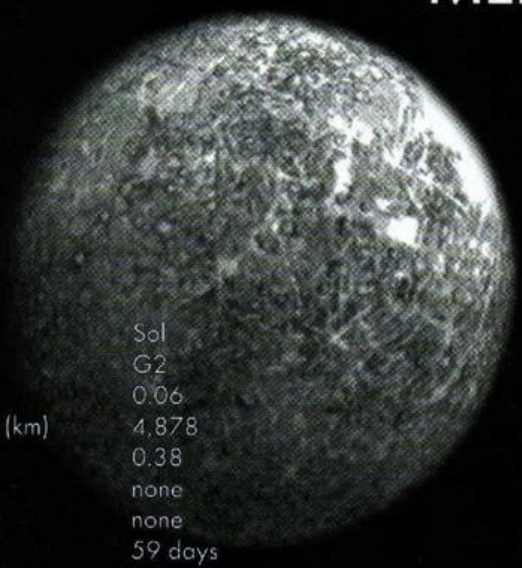
The Pit

— Dazyl Grenich, *Lifestyles* © 2120 MMI

Let's keep it quiet, kids; we're in a tough sec now. It's the infamous Pit, home of black *market*, black*mail* and way too much black *light*. The most dangerous twinks in the system live and breathe and eat and — well, this is a family show, so I won't go *there* — down here. Far under anything that could be considered civilized, this place smells worse than a broken-down trashpactor. The water's brown, and I wouldn't drink anything but the bar's highest-proof vodka — and that just to kill the biobugs that must infest the place.

Names you see scrawled only in graffiti up above are in neon here: Ekiwundu, Bear Under Glass, The Undertaker, Braza Verde, Jive. I don't dare take you inside these places for fear that this would be my farewell broadcast! The whole Pit is like this, except for the poor elgee secs — and they're *worse*. Take it from me: Stay Upside no matter *how* exotic the Underworld seems.

MERCURY



Sun	Sol
Sun's spectral type	G2
Mass (Earth = 1)	0.06
Equatorial diameter (km)	4,878
Gravity (Earth = 1)	0.38
Atmosphere	none
Indigenous life	none
Rotation period	59 days
Closest distance to Earth	0.54 AU
Primary satellites	none

Mercury is a moon-sized planet that has become known as the "hell of the universe." Its faces, exposed to or sheltered from the sun, are contrasts in abuse: excruciatingly hot or deathly cold. The planet supports no life and has no water, but does possess an abundance of metals, silicates and other exploitable minerals. This opportunity for industry was the inspiration for the Mercury Mining Consortium.

Several company exploratory missions mapped the surface of the planet and performed extensive spectroanalysis. Although Mercury has several veins of "luxury metals," such as gold and platinum, the planet's real wealth lies in rare metals — tungsten and molybdenum — used in ship-steel manufacture and other heavy industries.

MMC teams have been dropped to Mercury's desolate surface. Though not hospitable, the dark side proves less detrimental to both worker and machine life spans than the sunward does. Mining teams rotate on 25-day shifts, and find respite on a sparsely furnished orbital station (officially designated *MMC Orbital Station 1*, but known as "Purgatory" among its tenants).

Miner culture is tight and cliquish. Managers must maintain close relations with workers, prying into personal lives, addictions, debts and bad habits. Even a small error could kill an entire team on the harsh Mercurian surface. If someone has a conflict with another worker, no effort is spared to resolve it. If it cannot be resolved, one of those involved is transferred immediately.

As compensation for this brutal lifestyle, a Mercury miner receives excellent pay — and the death benefits are simply astonishing.

The breakthrough of olaminium, a new space-age element, has MMC worried about the future profitability of its operation. Investors are pressuring the corporation to do anything necessary to be competitive with the revolutionary space-industry material. Rumor has it that MMC agents are currently searching for flaws in olaminium, in an effort to discredit the substance and its UAN manufacturer.

VENUS

Sun	Sol
Sun's spectral type	G2
Mass (Earth = 1)	0.82
Equatorial diameter (km)	12,103
Gravity (Earth = 1)	0.88
Atmosphere	carbon dioxide
Indigenous life	none
Rotation period	243 days
Closest distance to Earth	0.27 AU
Primary satellites	none

Although commonly considered Earth's sister planet, and even once thought to be habitable, Venus actually has such an inhospitable environment that colonization has thus far proved impossible. Venus' dense, poisonous atmosphere is such an effective "greenhouse" that the planet's surface is hotter than Mercury's. Any water that Venus might have once held has been vaporized. Violent winds also rip at clouds in the atmosphere's upper layers.

Venus underwent extensive volcanic activity in the past; much of its surface was formed by lava flows. Modern volcanic activity is minimal. The planet has an incredibly slow retrograde rotation — a Venusian day lasts 243 Earth days.

Offworld Enterprises, Ltd., established *Perelandra Orbital Station* around Venus, both to study the planet's surface and as a private spacedock. Despite Venus' harsh conditions, OE investors hope that the planet's relative geological similarity to Earth will yield rare minerals. OE is advancing the development of exploratory work vehicles to test that theory, and sends probes into Venus' deadly atmosphere. If the project succeeds, OE will reap tremendous profits, not only from mineral mining, but through sales of advanced exploratory craft. *Perelandra Station* is already one of the private sector's primary manufacturers of orbital vessels.

Although a number of Earth governments purchase ships and parts from Offworld Enterprises, many of those same governments are suspicious of OE. The company is suspected of trying to form a "corporate state" in orbit around Venus, not dissimilar to the FSA's military-corporate establishment on Earth. Orgotek assigns electrokinetic patrols to Venus on a regular basis — to ensure that Aberrants cannot use Venus as a base, of course.

EARTH

Sun	Sol
Sun's spectral type	G2
Mass (Earth = 1)	1
Equatorial diameter (km)	12,756
Gravity (Earth = 1)	1
Atmosphere	nitrogen
Indigenous life	human
Rotation period	24 hours
Closest distance to Earth	n/a
Primary satellites	Luna

Luna is obviously the Earth's shining gem in the stars. Humanity's home has a number of artificial satellites in addition to the Moon. Most large corporations maintain offices in at least one of the three major Earth OSs, which orbit at Earth's Lagrange (or "L") points. Indeed, it seems that in order for one to succeed on Earth, one has to get off it.

Lulong Station, in the L5 point, houses the MultiNational Stock Exchange, where brokers make enough money to visit Earth every weekend. UAN's *Mujukuu* shares *Lulong Station*'s Lagrange point. The St. Petersburg Modern Freeform Ballet Troupe (associated with the venerable St. Petersburg Ballet) creates and holds microgravity performances at the *Mujukuu* Center for the Arts, and plays to packed houses despite the expensive seats. Opposite the Earth in the L4 point spins *Orgulho de Céu*, where Marquez Laboratories, in conjunction with the Norça, performs groundbreaking research in modern medicine, biotech and bioengineering. Marquez holds some of the most lucrative patents in the biosciences.

China has finally confirmed rumors of a long-anticipated, fourth orbital station. Tentatively named *Fengming Station* — "Phoenix Song" — it is intended to be a celebration of China's continued ascendance in space, a glorious tribute to the everlasting Chinese empire. The station will be located at the L1 Lagrange point occupied previously by the *Esperanza*, and is reportedly named in memory of the fallen station.

Orbital Stations

— Stephanie Chan, *The Final Frontier* © 2119 GN

Humanity's most prosperous cities don't even touch the ground. Enormous wealth goes into operating orbital stations, or "OSs," but the business that pervades these artificial floating meccas makes them more than worthwhile to the countries that maintain them. Grav-crystal manufacturing provides many space stations with the majority of their income. In fact, crystals made it possible to expand stations from their original status as factories into centers of commerce and recreation.

Earth's wealthy eagerly pay exorbitant prices for entry to these offworld playgrounds. Much as jetting to Paris in the 20th century or vacationing in Brazil in the 21st century was considered romantic and cosmopolitan, a visit to a majestic orbital city is considered the height of modern sophistication.

A thousand kilometers above Earth or Luna, one can romp in the *Lulong* zero-g sports center, view bioengineered animals and survivors of nearly extinct species in the *Orgulho de Céu* Terrarium, or take in the cultural feast that is the *Mujukuu* Center for the Arts.

Despite the *Esperanza* crash, orbital stations retain their image as glittering "castles in the air." Their freshly constituted and conditioned air is easy to breathe. Their corridors are spotless (maintained meticulously by maintenance serfs). Their chambers are breathtaking marvels of design (created by the brightest architectural minds of the day). Orbital stations are dreams given shape, and their residents pay tremendous amounts to live those dreams. OSs, as the playgrounds of the elite, have no slums — no visible ones, anyway. A ticket *down* the gravity well is much less expensive than a ticket *up*, and serves as the best way to get rid of the troublesome and unsightly.

MARS

Sun	Sol
Sun's spectral type	G2
Mass (Earth = 1)	0.11
Equatorial diameter (km)	6,794
Gravity (Earth = 1)	0.38
Atmosphere	carbon dioxide
Indigenous life	algae
Rotation period	25 hours
Closest distance to Earth	0.38 AU
Primary satellites	Phobos, Deimos

The Red Planet was the obvious choice for humanity's first extraplanetary efforts. Its proximity to Earth, frozen water supplies, moderate temperatures, and Earthlike rotation and gravity promised to make Mars a colonization dream.

The first manned Mars mission, China's *Xingyang Sujia*, resulted in a permanent installation. However, the base itself was fully automated and remained so for many years. Manned stations and mining facilities followed, but full-scale colonization began only after the development of gravity crystals.

Three colonies currently exist on Mars. The first is Wanjing, "The City of Rocklike Fortitude," on the Tharsis Bulge, just outside Olympus Mons' immense shadow. Chinese colonists hoped the location would yield fertile soil due to past volcanic activity. South America's Rio de Martio, built in and around Mars' distinctive "canals" (in reality extensive natural canyons), was intended to take advantage of the relatively thick atmosphere in the planet's low regions. Unfortunately, the fault lines that created the canals continue their tectonic activity today, causing problems for settlers. Like Rio de Martio, Akabenje Colony takes advantage of low altitudes. This African station is located in scattered meteor craters within the greater Gusev crater.

Despite other nations' presence, China remains the power on Mars, with over half a million Chinese colonists living in cubic clusters and under small domed complexes.

Martian governments have worked since the early 2090s to make the planet even more hospitable. Their initial efforts involved firing ice asteroids into the atmosphere to increase oxygen levels and provide moisture. Augmented water content and limited greenhouse effect (a calculated result of dust clouds raised by the asteroids' impacts) were merely the beginning of what was sure to be a centuries-long terraforming process. Sadly, the process was made even more difficult by the nations' constant bickering over territorial rights.

> ***— Newsworld's "Notable Quotables" 8.3.2111***
>
> "It's hard not to anthropomorphize the little bastards when it seems like they go to every effort to sabotage your work."
>
> — Mars Terraforming Project microecology research leader Dr. Alvin Jost, on the organization's "declaration of war" against native Martian microorganisms

In 2109, Orgotek proposed to the Chinese, Brazilian and African governments that the order could accelerate Mars' terraforming with advanced bioware. Using human and Qin biotechnology, Orgotek initiated this enormous task with an army of engineered microbiological organisms and gigantic terrestrial and orbital bio-structures. The procedure was designed to thicken Mars' atmosphere by introducing an ozone layer and seeding the planet with oxygen-producing organisms. The goal: to eliminate the need for sealed colonization environments.

However, Orgotek neglected to account for native Martian life. Mars' micro-ecology, discovered in the late 20th century, was considered an irrelevant factor in the terraforming process. While Chinese scientists opposed Orgotek's plan, citing the unknown potential of the planet's ecology, the electrokinetics dismissed their concerns. Much to the 'teks' chagrin, the microorganisms proved a bigger problem than anyone could have guessed.

Mars and Aberrant Attacks

Mars became a target for Aberrants attacks shortly after the abominations returned in 2104. The raids were quick and uncoordinated, consisting largely of strikes against terraforming equipment and the occasional outpost. The emergence of the psions slowed the rate of attacks somewhat, but did not stop them entirely.

However, as Aberrant attacks seem to have become larger and better organized in the past year, raids staged on Mars have diminished — none have occurred in the past 13 months. Æon Trinity agents coincide the reduction with the arrival of Norça agents on Mars. Biokinetics have been stationed on the Red Planet to assist in the control of native Martian microorganisms through use of South American terraforming techniques. No other correlations have been made with the reduction in Aberrant raids, though the investigation continues.

Press Release, 7.18.2119

Current Status of the Mars Terraforming Project — Orgotek

Using state-of-the-art bio- and hardtech methods, we have made monumental changes to Mars' ecology. Yet we still have a long way to go before the planet can be considered "completely terraformed."

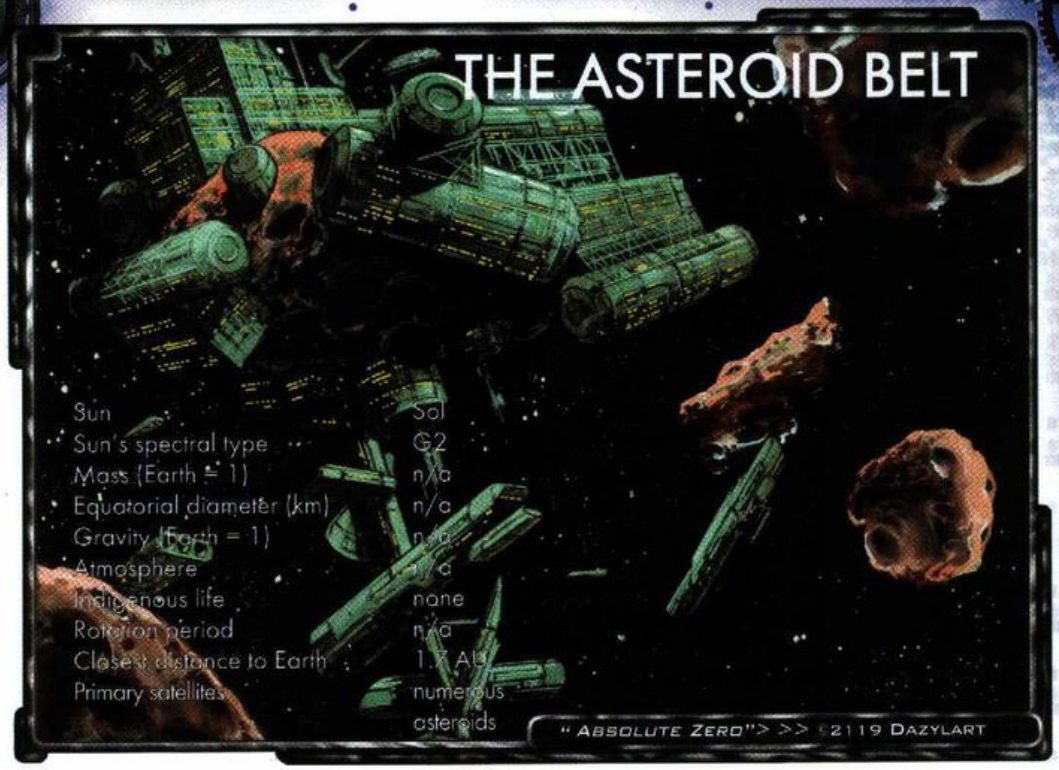
The process used prior to the introduction of biotechnology would have taken at least 1,000 years to complete. Our incredible breakthroughs in biotechnology, combined with those of the Qin, have reduced that time immensely — to less than 75 years! Unfortunately, unforeseen complications presented by native life have increased the task's already significant challenge. It remains to be seen how much of an impact the Martian organisms will have.

Atmospheric Qualities	Mars, 2109	Mars, 2119
Carbon Dioxide	95%	86%
Nitrogen	3.1%	7%
Argon	1.5%	1.5%
Oxygen	negligible	1.3%
Water	negligible	2.4%
Avg. Air Pressure	7 millibars	50 millibars

As you can see, we have already introduced significant changes, particularly in atmospheric pressure. Although the proportional changes may seem small, more than 100,000 *metric tons* of oxygen have been incorporated into Mars' atmosphere. We hope that the planet's ecology will soon support and continue this transformation on its own. However, the changes made have caused the native flora to evolve at an astounding and unpredictable rate. The microorganism population has grown by two orders of magnitude, competing with the organisms introduced by the project.

We are currently working on several ways to curb this impact, and are confident that the project will prosper despite this setback. We have every confidence in our scientists and technology.

THE ASTEROID BELT



The Nihonjin developed a research station in 2080 strictly for use in the asteroid belt. The *Fuyoushi*'s crew found a stable solar orbit among the tumbling rocks and ran exploratory spectra on the region. Nippon decided within a few years that returns from mining the asteroid belt weren't worth the finances required to operate the station.

A small group of interplanetary entrepreneurs purchased *Fuyoushi*. These people were from different walks of life, countries, religions and cultures, but shared a vision for Belt life. Small groups and individuals bought outdated ships, loaded them with the most up-to-date spectral analysis equipment they could afford, and rocketed into the Belt to strike it rich on some platinum-rich asteroid.

Misfits, outlaws and victims of poverty and overcrowding flocked to the Belt, searching for the dream claim that would turn their lives around. All those people needed a place to make repairs, to restock provisions and to kick back. *Fuyoushi*, or Absolute Zero as it became known, is just such a place.

Though the "floating diner in space" has been a science fiction joke for centuries, that is just what Absolute Zero has become. It contains a few bars, a few "greasy-spoon" restaurants, a "general store" that supplies basic necessities, several flophouses, three competing brothels and an enormous docking space for its free market. A sort-of "poor man's Olympus," the free market handles virtually all intersolar trade beyond Luna's sphere of influence. Crews dock, trade, enjoy the local scene and depart. The station's main clientele are orbital miners. Absolute Zero is a second home for many of them.

Fuyoushi, located far from any organized law, is a genuine frontier. Corpses get flushed out of airlocks, and barroom brawls result in dozens of people being admitted to medical facilities (which are run by overworked Æsculapians). Law enforcement officers routinely stalk criminals here. And yet Absolute Zero is the best place — outside Luna — to hear gossip, rumors and news about the spaceways.

JUPITER

Sun	Sol
Sun's spectral type	G2
Mass (Earth = 1)	317.9
Equatorial diameter (km)	142,800
Gravity (Earth = 1)	2.6
Atmosphere	hydrogen
Indigenous life	none
Rotation period	10 hours
Closest distance to Earth	3.95 AU
Primary satellites	Callisto, Europa, Ganymede, Io

The second-largest body in the solar system next to the Sun, Jupiter is a treasure trove for scientists, but holds little interest for the economically minded. The Jovian moons, however, are targeted for development by various corporate and government concerns.

Europa

The Norça, working in tandem with the Brazilian government, laid claim to Europa as a likely source of undiscovered extraterrestrial life in our solar system. Given the difficulties that Orgotek has run into on Mars, the biokinetic order is proceeding cautiously, with the intent of studying rather than eradicating possible native life on Jupiter's small moon.

Europa consists mainly of water, with a kilometers-thick ice shell over a liquid ocean. The moon's center is hot like Earth's core, which maintains the liquid water under the ice. Dark streaks crisscrossing the ice surface are caused by exploding geysers of warm water. Officially, Europa is mined for its water reserves, which supposedly help fund the Norça's various research projects.

The biokinetics postulate that life forms exist in Europa's oceans, surviving on thermosynthesis rather than photosynthesis — that is, an entire ecosystem thriving on heat instead of light. Like bizarre tube worms or bacteria that live near heat vents on Earth's ocean floor, any fauna on Europa is believed to have evolved without plants to feed on.

Although theories regarding this extraterrestrial life fascinate scientists, the problems of researching the hypothesis are enormous. The task involves drilling through a several-kilometer-thick ice crust, and exploring Europa's vast oceans in a properly equipped vessel, all without knowing the underwater geography or conditions. Yet the Norça pursue their research with great fervor.

The order suppresses all information on the project. Whether the biokinetics have found anything, and why the group is being close-mouthed, is unknown.

Ganymede

Ganymede is the largest of Jupiter's moons. Surveys of the satellite indicated that its silicate mantle was prime for gemstone and potential mineral mining. However, the moon also proved tectonically sound, a stable body conducive to colonization. The UAN claimed Ganymede's mining rights in 2089, and the Kiremte mining station expanded into a true colony 19 years ago.

Water Mining

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective*
© 2119 OBC

Water is in high demand throughout human space for a number of applications. Deuterium is extracted from it for hyper-fusion reactors, oxygen is drawn from it for life-support systems, and moisture is condensed from it for Mars' terraforming. Water also serves less glamorous but no less important duties in flushing sewer systems and acting as a coolant.

The multi-billion yuan industry supplies ice to lunar mining stations, colonies and various orbital stations. Even though most ships and stations recycle their water continuously, the fluid can be recirculated a finite amount before it must be replaced, and fresh volumes are always desirable.

The two largest water-mining companies are ICE, the International Consortium for Ecomining, reportedly controlled by the Norça, which operates on Europa, and ABI, Amalgamated Business Interests, which is active on Tethys. Jupiter's Callisto was the first celestial water mining site, but Europa is currently the largest and most lucrative operation followed by Saturn's Tethys.

Small operations and entrepreneurs occupy the lower ranks of the industry. They use single ships or small fleets, independently contracted mining teams and even illegal mining sites to make their fortunes.

(The oldest "native" Ganymedan is 16.) Kiremte's original population of 1,000 has grown through births and emigration to a healthy 8,000 individuals, and the colony still accepts residents. Although the base's main income comes from mining, specialists in other professions (especially medicine) are encouraged to apply for citizenship.

Kiremte supplements its mineral mining with some water excavation, to escape the stellar water market's high prices. Minerals are still the focus, though; several valuable veins of gemstones, metals and more prosaic but no less valuable minerals draw in a great deal more money than any of the original colonists would have thought possible.

Io

Caught in a close orbit around Jupiter's monstrous demistellar mass, Io generates trillions of watts of power simply by traveling its preordained course. The UAN claimed the volcanic moon to take advantage of this resource, then spent several years debating its possible uses. A station could not be established on its surface — liquid sulfur lakes, an unstable surface and molten rock made for stunning visuals but undesirable habitation. Furthermore, the Jovian magnetosphere made life outside a heavily shielded spacecraft extremely short.

The UAN finally constructed an orbital station at one of Io's Lagrange points. The *Mafaa-3* station produces enough energy to power most of human space, including all of Earth. The UAN used the allure of this incredible power to recruit renowned physicists and chemists to take part in an incredible project: increasing the number of elements on the periodic table. *Mafaa-3*'s cheap and plentiful power allowed the to UAN push the limits of known science, and to confirm a long-standing theory: stable and nonradioactive elements could indeed be found at key points on the periodic table. The *Mafaa-3* research team already created the first new element, olaminium, and the station currently gears up to produce this ultradense element on a commercial scale.

Olaminium

A new development in armor, shielding and weapons manufacture has revolutionized space travel and colonization. Olaminium, a stable, ultradense metal, has replaced depleted uranium as the premiere component of military and space technology. At present, the UAN markets this new element and its alloys through Tangent Technologies. The substance is highly restricted, available in small amounts and at exorbitant prices.

Materials made of olaminium are virtually impenetrable by radiation, and can withstand impacts from heavy weapons and space debris better than orbital steel or titanium. Money pours into the UAN from military agencies across settled space to reserve supplies of the element itself, of olaminium steel and of olaminium-titanium alloy.

·TRITON ARCHIVE·

Subject: Heavy Metal Project
From: IUPAC, Geneva, Switzerland
To: A. Olaminia, *Mafaa-3*, Io
Encryption: SPE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 15:42:15 6.2.2115

Dear Dr. Olamina:

Please accept the committee's congratulations on your discovery. The IUPAC Elemental Names Committee has confirmed that the name of Element 114 on the Periodic Table is Olaminium.

Sincerely,
Lili Albrecht, Ph.D.
IUPAC ENC liaison

The frustratingly slow production promises to be worth the wait. Initial tests of olaminium on *Mafaa-3* indicate that ships and space stations will be better protected against radiation than ever before, improving the safety of life in space. Bulkheads need not be as thick as they currently are nor do they need to be covered in layers of rock or Mylex, allowing for new designs in spacefaring vehicles and stations. Even space suits may be made impervious to radiation or accidental puncture when lined with olaminium or one of its associated compounds.

Governments and corporations bidding on ola-minium resources agree, at least publicly, that initial supplies should be devoted to psion efforts to protect against the Aberrants and to return to colonies lost in space.

The UAN also built a terawatt laser in 2113 — designated "*Tooci*," Lugandan for torch — which also accesses Io's tremendous energy. Tests to apply the laser array as a means of near-light-speed travel were stepped up dramatically after the Upeo wa Macho disappeared.

A ship supplied with large solar sails can ride the laser, accelerating toward its destination at incredible speeds. Granted, this is a one-way boost, but the UAN feels the need to develop a method of long distance travel not dependent entirely on psions.

Tooci also serves as a formidable defense system for Io, and the UAN is close to completing a second terawatt array.

·TRITON ARCHIVE·

Subject: Element 114
From: A. Olaminia
To: HMP Research Team
Encryption: SPE
Transmission type: holofile
Date: 24:01:14 6.3.2115

I am extremely honored by the IUPAC committee and especially by all of you for your nomination. In all fairness, Element 114 should bear the name of every person on this project, if only it wouldn't be so long to pronounce! I don't feel I deserve all the honor, given the wholehearted effort made by everyone on this staff.

Thank you.

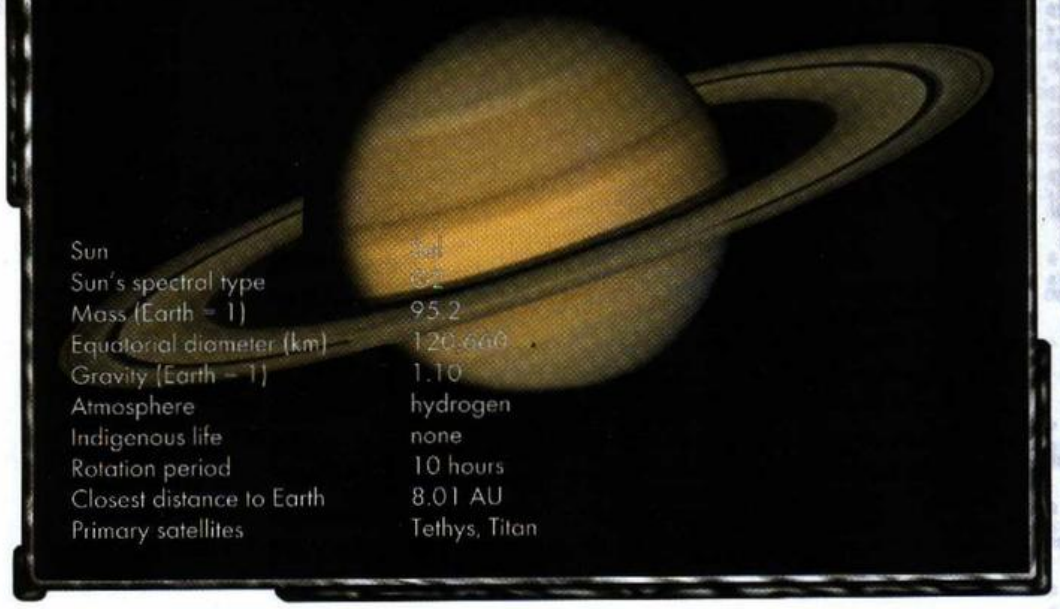
In any case, I think it's extremely appropriate that the first use we'll make of our "superdense" material is to improve the quality of life here on the station. With the 114 shielding in place, we'll see a stunning drop in radiation levels throughout the spectrum. *Mafaa-3* should be safer than Earth when the project is complete, which means our rotation schedule will become obsolete. (I know, just what you all wanted to hear — longer shifts and less vacation.) Seriously, we won't be dragged out of the lab just when we're in the middle of discovering something important.

One other point: We need a military liaison. We're already besieged about projectile testing and other military applications for 114. I'm negotiating with Tangent as a possible dodge of complete military possession. Volunteers for the liaison position are desperately needed. If I don't get any, I'll ask everyone why they can't do it and pick the person who does the best job of weaseling out of it.

Again, thank you and congratulations to us all!

O

SATURN



Sun	Sol
Sun's spectral type	G2
Mass (Earth = 1)	95.2
Equatorial diameter (km)	120,660
Gravity (Earth = 1)	1.10
Atmosphere	hydrogen
Indigenous life	none
Rotation period	10 hours
Closest distance to Earth	8.01 AU
Primary satellites	Tethys, Titan

Like Jupiter, Saturn is snubbed in favor of its moons. The Ringed Planet is currently the farthest distance that humanity has established permanent outposts within our solar system (although Otha Herzog's mysterious *Huruf al-Hayy* orbital station is rumored to orbit Neptune).

Tethys

This moon is one of the few celestial bodies exploited completely by a corporation. The Tethys water-mining station is reportedly the 22nd-century equivalent of a "company town." It operates without any governmental or colonial restrictions or laws, and has correspondingly poor working conditions, even poorer living conditions, and operates debt slavery.

ABI owns and operates Tethys and its Amano-Kelsian mining colony, located on the edge of the moon's Odysseus impact crater. The site's mining and support staff has generated astronomical profits. How much return the 20,000 workers have received of the billions of yuan made is another question entirely.

Tethys' own small moons, Telesto and Calypso, have sufficient mass to generate faint "tidal" effects on the main satellite's surface. Tidal surges make mining operations hazardous, especially due to stress fractures that run through the icy crust.

ABI vigorously denies allegations that miners work — and live — in Tethys' natural gravity to improve productivity, and to prevent them from escaping to a planet with higher gravity. Such rumors are surely exaggerated; pseudo-gravity grids are standard in low-gravity complexes, since humans who remain in microgravity develop brittle bones and aren't efficient laborers. Still, it's almost unheard-of for miners to leave Tethys, prompting competing organizations to derisively shorten Amano-Kelsian to "Amano-Kill."

Titan

Saturn's largest moon is the newest subject in the Norça's ongoing search for extraterrestrial life. Titan is larger than both Mercury and Pluto, and half of it is ice. The rest is rock, and readings suggest that the moon's core may still be hot. Titan's atmosphere is more dense than Earth's and contains such organic compounds as ethane, carbon dioxide and hydrogen cyanide — highly poisonous to humans, but perhaps a source for carbon-based life.

The biokinetic order has financed two exploratory missions to Titan and may stake a claim. What the silent Norça hope to gain from searching Europa and Titan for life is anyone's guess.

URANUS, NEPTUNE AND PLUTO

Sun	Sol		
Sun's spectral type	G2		
Planets	Uranus	Neptune	Pluto
Mass (Earth = 1)	14.6	17.2	0.002
Equatorial diameter (km)	51,400	50,950	3,500
Gravity (Earth = 1)	1.15	1.2	0.08
Atmosphere	hydrogen	hydrogen	methane
Indigenous life	none	none	none
Rotation period	16 hours	18 hours	6 days
Closest distance to Earth	17.28 AU	28.8 AU	28.7 AU
Primary satellites	Oberon, Titania	Triton, Nereid, Proteus	Charon

The gas giants of Uranus and Neptune and the frozen ball of Pluto orbit the coldest fringes of our solar system. While of scientific interest, the three outermost planets hold little practical appeal to humanity at the present time. Jupiter and Saturn are much closer for studying gas giants, and Pluto is currently little more than a curiosity. Most corporations and governments feel the risk of setting up a research outpost that far out isn't worth the possible gain, especially with the ever-present threat of Aberrant attack. Instead, the metacorps and nations prefer to focus their intentions closer to home.

The only traffic that goes to the solar system's edge are sensor buoy repair crews and manned patrols that search for Aberrant and other hostile incursion. Also, the jump ships travel beyond Uranus' orbit prior to teleporting. Although they could theoretically jump from Earth orbit, the psionic shockwave that radiates from a jump ship's passage would devastate most Gifted. The physical distance gained by traveling so far out dissipates the psi wave before it reaches Earth.

It's commonly thought that Proxy Otha Herzog lives in Neptune's orbit on *Huruf al-Hayy*, but as yet the regular patrols and sensor sweeps haven't confirmed the presence of any artificial structures around the planet.

INTERSTELLAR COLONIES

As soon as humanity rose from the ashes of the Aberrant War and its hopes turned to space once again, the long-time dream of traveling beyond our solar system was rekindled. As they had led the way in most space endeavors, the Chinese were the first to make a foray into the stars.

Early interstellar colonization attempts were made under humanity's own power and ingenuity. Such endeavors involved extensive scans into different quadrants of space, searching for systems that might support life. The automated research craft launched to such places transmitted useful data only after years of travel through the stars. The few colony ships launched to likely systems weren't expected to reach alien planets for decades more, and only one such attempt was successfully confirmed.

Finally, when the psi orders presented themselves to the world, humanity used psions to catapult itself beyond its home. The teleporting Upeo were instrumental to transporting vehicles, people and materials into deep space, to planets that the clairsentients and proxies had located and studied. Indeed, it was the psions' powers and efforts that led to first contact with the Qin, and each race's establishment of embassies on the other's homeworld. The ultimate result of deep-space travel was five colonies that humanity could call home.

After the Upeo disappeared in 2114, apparently due to Aberrant actions, humanity lost contact with its distant outposts. There was (and is) no telling what befell the colonies, trapped as they were in the unforgiving void, vulnerable to the Aberrants' resurgence and to the depredations of a new, hostile enemy race known only as the Chromatics.

Despite heroic efforts, no one has been able to learn the status of any of the lost colonies. Enhanced telepathy and clairsentience provide only vague readings — that the planets still exist, but no details on their inhabitants. High-speed laser transmissions will take years to reach Khantze Lu Ge, the closest of the outposts. Only the Æon Trinity and the orders' development of new jump ships may finally enable Earth to regain contact with its lost people, and to return the Qin ambassadors to their home. It remains to be seen how the colonies have fared in the past five years.

Khantze Lu Ge

The first settlement outside of our own solar system was established in Alpha Centauri, the closest system to home. In 2087, after a decade-long journey, a Chinese exploration ship landed on a lifeless but vaguely Earthlike planet in orbit around Alpha Centauri B. Named Khantze Lu Ge, the planet was barely suitable for human habitation, but having little choice, the explorers dedicated themselves to making their new home livable. An atmosphere-building program had a remarkable effect on the planet and proved that humanity could survive on other worlds.

Khantze Lu Ge is a dark, cool planet, orbiting at a little less than one AU from its dim orange star. Not even the brighter, yellow Alpha Centauri A alleviates the colony's eternal twilight (and the even more distant Proxima Centauri never seems more than a small red moon). The planet's negligible tilt limits habitation

The Castle in the Sky

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective*
© 2115 OBC

Even today, China's venture to Alpha Centauri is considered one of the most suicidal gambles in human history. As much as the "Space Race" of the mid-20th century motivated world powers to throw untried technology at the stars, so too did China, in its frenzy to control space, hasten its expedition.

China's no-frills space ark, piggybacked to the Lito Comet, should never have been able to make the four-light-year journey — and certainly not in a mere 12 years. Yet it did. The majority of the explorers survived, and were on hand to receive the automated colonization freighters that China launched in pursuit of them. Such an extreme achievement bears witness to the heights of both human perseverance and folly. Khantze Lu Ge was truly a "castle in the sky."

KHANTZE LU GE

·TRITON ARCHIVE·

Alpha Centauri System

Suns	Er (Alpha Centauri B — primary), Yi (Alpha Centauri A), Proxima Centauri
Suns' spectral type	K1, G2, M5

KHANTZE LU GE

Founded	2087 (China)
Source	astronomical observation
Planet mass (Earth = 1)	0.87
Equatorial diameter (km)	12,330
Planet gravity (Earth = 1)	1.07
Water content (Earth = 0.75)	0.34
Atmosphere	nitrogen
Rotation period	31 hours
Indigenous life	none
Human population	3,000,000
Closest distance to Earth	4.3 light years
Primary satelite	Jixing Gaozhao

and agriculture to the relatively temperate equatorial region. The air is thin and dry, barely breathable, but massive hyper-fusion air regulators forcibly evaporate the polar ice caps to thicken the atmosphere.

Indeed, technology made the colony livable, from constantly modified and upgraded air regulators to artificially lit hydroponic gardens to light-augmenting contact lenses to thermal clothing for forays outside the arcologies.

After the psionic orders went public, colonists traveled to Alpha Centauri in droves. The inhabitants of Khantze Lu Ge accepted the immigrants grudgingly. Advanced Earth technologies previously unknown to the isolated world were suddenly available, and the colony grew by leaps and bounds.

New arrivals quickly partook in the spirit that had made Khantze Lu Ge successful during its previous 20 years of self-reliance. Though never integrated fully into the established society, newcomers soon outnumbered the original colonists and overwhelmed any opposition to their presence.

With the Upeos' disappearance, Khantze Lu Ge returned to its former state of isolation. We can only speculate on what has happened since, though the colony should remain self-sufficient if it has been unmolested.

In 2116, after concluding that the teleporters weren't returning, the Chinese used the *Mafaa-3* terawatt laser array to launch a scout mission to Alpha Centauri. Sporadic telepathic communication indicates that a similar mission was sent from Alpha Centauri to Earth, though without the benefit of a terawatt laser launch. Sensors have been set to detect the LuGeian ship's approach, although none is expected for years to come.

Aww! 4.23.2116

Ms. Narayan,

It is with humble apologies that I must tender my resignation without the four days notice required by law. As you know, I am LuGeian, and I am certain you are aware of the mission other LuGeians have mounted to return home. Despite the acute homesickness I experienced after the loss of interstellar space travel, I felt that I could continue my work with you.

But as the LuGeian expedition's departure draws near, I know with certainty that I must be on that ship. I have enjoyed my stay on Earth, and appreciate the opportunities you have given me. Still, I am long overdue to see my home, and the journey is a long one.

Sincerely,
Michael Ganshin

QINSHUI

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

Qinjunan System	
Sun	Qinri
Sun's spectral type	F8
QINSHUI	
Founded	2108 (Embassy, Earth United Nations)
Source	psion discovery
Planet mass (Earth = 1)	0.99
Equatorial diameter	12,821
Planet gravity (Earth = 1)	0.97
Water content (Earth = 0.75)	0.89
Atmosphere	nitrogen
Rotation period	21 hours
Indigenous life	Qin, variety of animals, vegetables, microbes
Human population	13,000
Closest distance to Earth	17,000 light years
Primary satellite	none

Qinshui

Diplomatic relations began between Qin and humans immediately after their historical meeting in 2107. Both have since established embassies in the other's systems, the Qin on the Moon, and humans in a domed facility on the Qin homeworld in the Qinjunan system.

The Qin have a great deal in common with humans, including home planets. Qinshui has gravity similar to Earth's and is composed mostly of water, although Qinshui's land masses are smaller, with no recognizable continents. The atmosphere is very thick, soupy and humid but Earthlike; vegetation, animal life and weather resemble those of Earth's marshy regions. Qinshui has no moons, and therefore no tidal forces, resulting in relatively calm oceans.

Qinshui is located on the edge of the 47 Tucanae globular cluster. In this extremely dense group of stars, one need merely look up to know he is far from Earth. The sky is brilliant at night, with stars packed so closely together that the concept of constellations is alien to the Qin. Our Milky Way is merely a dim pool of stars in their northern hemisphere. The intense stellar concentration gives daylight a radiance equal to that of a sunny Earth day, despite even extreme cloud cover. Nights are ethereal, the stars casting a gentle glow over the world. Qinshui's seasons are similar to Earth's, and are determined by the cluster core's position in the sky during daylight hours throughout the year.

The human embassy to the Qin is a biosphere located on one of the northern hemisphere's large land masses, near the Qin equivalent of Earth's United Nations. Human bureaucrats get headaches dealing with the Qin, as it is difficult for humans to distinguish between Qin nations. The human delegates can venture elsewhere on Qinshui without needing environment suits, although it's not unlike walking through a constant drizzle in the height of summer.

The domed embassy, designed to be a little piece of Earth on Qinshui, is regulated to human comfort zones. As Earth's first embassy to an alien race, it is populated by extraordinary individuals and support staff. It has all the comforts of

Qin Welcoming Speech

— Excerpt: textfile transcript, with telepathic notation [] included

"We are cheerful [pleased] to engage in the dual [mutual] advancement of our two selves [peoples?]. Please be accepting of [we hope you enjoy] the pond [home?] we have poured [built?] for you here on Qinshui. If there is anything you thirst for [require], do not falter in inquiring. This is a honorable [historic?] time, and we shall allow nothing to dam [stop] it from becoming a successful future."

home, with the Qin always eager to provide anything lacking. At last contact, the political atmosphere on Qinshui was still somewhat paranoid, and humans were always careful to provide their own technology and bioware. Security was tight, and both Qin and humans were cautious about what they said and did in the other's presence.

When communications were cut with Qinshui after the Upeo disappearance, both humans and those Qin in our solar system were understandably concerned. Qin representatives on Luna claim to be confident that the human embassy will be taken care of, but tension grows as the years pass with no contact. The stranded Qin assist in creating new interstellar transports. Indeed, Qin bioware and input were key to jump-ship development.

Karroo Mining Colony

In 2109, an African expedition made a daring teleport to the Crab Nebula, a supernova remnant first seen on Earth in A.D. 1054. It is an inhospitable region with no large planetary bodies and a single rapidly spinning neutron star. However, the sector is rich with dust clouds, gaseous nebulae and asteroid fragments composed of valuable heavy elements. The UAN established a,stellar science and mining station just outside the nebula, despite the extreme risk involved in the venture. Heavily shielded stations were anchored to planetesimals, and the Karroo Mining Colony was born.

Although the UAN established the colony, rugged humans of all nationalities flocked there, lured by the promise of wealth. In only a few years, Karroo swelled to over 20 times its original size.The UAN's profitable taxation system funded mining with little investment on the government's part. Scientists eager to research the Crab Nebula on its very doorstep flocked to the colony as well.

As Karoo expanded, the need for more station conduits, hydroponics bays, Mylex shielding and pseudo-gravity grids increased dramatically. Importing such materials from Earth to the ever-expanding station system was expensive. Additionally, over time the UAN and private Upeo shippers couldn't keep pace with the growing number of emigrés. The colony established its own independent manufacturing and farming stations eventually, trading the elements mined from the nebula in return for the more easily transported raw materials Karroo needed to expand further.

Karroo reached relative self-sufficiency just prior to the Chromatics' attack in 2113. The first assault surprised the colonists completely. The humans suffered heavy losses, but regrouped and changed focus from mining to warfare to keep the aliens from obliterating everything they had built. The Chromatics' apparent photokinetic capabilities rendered the colonists' laser

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

Crab Nebula

Sun	Crab Pulsar
Sun's spectral type	neutron star (21 pulses per second)
Planet	n/a
Founded	2109 (United African Nations)
Source	Upeo/ISRA joint exploration
Planet mass (Earth = 1)	n/a
Equatorial diameter	n/a
Planet gravity (Earth = 1)	n/a
Water content (Earth = 0.75)	n/a
Atmosphere	n/a
Rotation period	n/a
Indigenous life	Chromatics (?)
Human population	85,000
Closest distance to Earth	6,500 light years
Primary satellite	none

"KARROO ATTACKED" > DAVE.A.I. > KARROO MEMORIAL, TANZANIA

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

The First Attack

— General Abasa, Karroo Mining Colony

Mwalimu,

We are under attack from an alien force. Our lasers have no noticeable effect, and theirs are deadly. They appeared out of nowhere, and all attempts at communication have failed. Members of the Ministry in residence here have ascertained that these alien creatures perceive us to be like Aberrants, whom they have apparently encountered before. The telepaths have been overwhelmed by feelings of intense hatred from these beings. These aliens are not Qin. They are something completely new.

I request all possible assistance. Please be advised that we are sending children and wounded back to Earth as soon as we receive word. We have sent a captured alien corpse with this dispatch. I apologize that I could not forewarn you, but I wanted it to arrive as soon as possible, while it was still…glowing.

weapons virtually useless. The resourceful Karroos fell back on conventional slugthrowers and coilguns as well as orbital knives and clubs. Additionally, the colonists explored the effectiveness of other energy weapons, such as plasma cannons and ion beams.

The Upeo vanished just as the tide of battle turned in the colony's favor. Karroo's fate is unknown, but considering we know next to nothing about the Chromatics' origins and the colony no longer has support from Earth, the worst is assumed. All attempts at re-establishing communications have failed; the colony is simply too far away.

Far Nyumba

The clairsentients' search for habitable planets in deep space was long and strenuous. Otha Herzog himself plied his powers extensively during humanity's rush to colonize the stars. The likelihood of finding sectors that could support human life was almost nonexistent, so when Far Nyumba was discovered and proved suitable, it was settled promptly by the UAN in 2112.

The largest moon of the gas giant Mgitu, Far Nyumba is similar to Earth in size, gravity, planetary tilt and atmospheric composition. Though seven AU from its single sun, the massive Mgitu is nearly a brown dwarf star itself and provides the moon with more than enough heat and light to make up the difference. Most of Far Nyumba's single land mass is covered by thick rain

FAR NYUMBA

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

SS1515 System

Suns	SS1515a
Suns' spectral type	A7
MGITU (GAS GIANT/ BROWN DWARF PROTOSTAR)	
Founded	2112 (United African Nations)
Source	ISRA discovery
Planet mass (Earth = 1)	364.6 (Mgitu) 1.01 (Far Nyumba)
Equatorial diameter (km)	187,463 (Mgitu) 12, 895 (Far Nyumba)
Planet gravity (Earth = 1)	2.8 (Mgitu) 0.92 (Far Nyumba)
Water content	n/a (Mgitu) 0.79 (Far Nyumba)
Atmosphere	hydrogen (Mgitu) nitrogen (Far Nyumba)
Rotation period	8 hours (Mgitu) 27 hours (Far Nyumba)
Indigenous life	plants, insects, protocreatures
Human population	8,000
Closest distance to Earth	11,000 light years
Primary satellites (Mgitu)	Far Nyumba, Kala
(Far Nyumba)	none

forest, the remainder is devastated by constant volcanic activity. Microbes and insects are the only significant animal life beyond tiny protocreatures destined to become mammals, birds and reptiles. The insect population is kept in check more by the abundance of carnivorous plants than by the scattered proto-animals.

Mgitu dominates the Far Nyumba sky, at least above the tree canopy. The gas giant's eerie colorful glow bathes the moon with light more than the system's sun does. Daytime is determined by Far Nyumba's orientation to Mgitu, not to the sun. A dozen other moons, sister satellites to Mgitu, also track across Far Nyumba's sky.

Far Nyumba itself provides plenty for colonists to study. Still, curious humans also explored the Mgitu's surface atmosphere, mainly as an accessible source of vital gases. The gas giant's cloud layers are truly alien, but beautiful. Particularly brave or foolish Legionnaires, sealed in small capsules or even in heavy pressure suits, used their powers to venture deeper into the atmosphere than exploratory craft could.

A year after the colony's establishment, Legionnaires made an incredible discovery on Mgitu. All manner of strange structures and objects floated in the atmo-sphere's stormy layers. Scientists and archeologists rushed out to study these alien relics, causing a surge in Far Nyumba's population.

The moon base was the most promising and hospitable of all the extrasolar colonies for a few short months. Many great minds were stranded on Far Nyumba when the Upeo disappeared. The number of colonists and available resources were so few that the outpost's continued existence five years later is in doubt.

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

New Discovery

— Excerpt: holobrief from Jerome Dannikan, Ph.D. (Noetics), M.Sc. (Electrical Engineering) to the *Journal of Xenological Science*, 3.17.2114

The artifacts found last week range in size from a small... spaceship?...(roughly 15 meters in length) to easily pocketed items (.02 meters) and are made of both organic and inorganic alloys. These objects are clearly not of human or Qin design.

The items hover with eerie stability, suspended in Mgitu's hydrogen atmosphere, and contain unfathomable circuitry. My plan is to locate and tag as many items as possible, to see if they are linked in any way. I will proceed with a thorough physical examination of minor devices, with psi examination to follow as soon as appropriate psions become available.

AVERIGUAS

TRITON ARCHIVE

SS3819 System

Suns	SS3819a (giant), SS3819b (dwarf)
Suns' spectral types	G5, A0

AVERIGUAS (ASSOCIACAO ADIANTAMENTO UNIVERSAL)

Founded	2106 (Brazil)
Source	Upeo investigation
Planet mass (Earth = 1)	1.17
Equatorial diameter (km)	12,821
Planet gravity (Earth = 1)	1.10
Water content (Earth = 0.75)	0.42
Atmosphere	nitrogen
Rotation period	23 hours
Indigenous life	algae in oceans, no notable land life
Human population	22,000
Closest distance to Earth	2,800 light years
Primary satellite	Vigiar

Averiguas

Shortly after Aberrant attacks grew more organized, Brazil established a deep-space colony. With Norça guidance, the Upeo transported explorers to a white dwarf/red giant binary system.

The fifth planet of six, designated Averiguas, orbited the red giant at a relatively comfortable 1.7 AU. The rocky planet proved capable of supporting human life and even hosted a sort of proto-algae life form.

The Associacao Adiantamento Universal (the Association for Universal Advancement) — or AAU, as the Averiguas colony was named — was meant as a psion training ground. Here, Brazil claimed, the Gifted could explore the potential of their powers without fear of causing harm or destruction. Strangely, only Norça agents had the opportunity to use the facility.

The Æon Trinity discovered that Brazil wanted to guarantee its future should the resurgent Aberrants prove too powerful. Working in conjunction with the Norça, Brazil established Averiguas as an extrasolar military base.

The system's instability made the site inhospitable to other colonization efforts. Averiguas was ideal for the Brazilian plan, however — remote, dangerous and of little foreign interest. Despite warnings that the white dwarf could go nova, and its ominously regular flares as it absorbed the red giant's stellar matter, Brazil proceeded with construction.

The Brazilians made one mistake in establishing AAU: They relied on subjugated Euro-American workers. These disenfranchised looked for new opportunities everywhere, and Averiguas was as good a place as any to make a fortune. The Æon Trinity learned that working conditions were quite brutal. It was only a matter of time before the Western "never say die" spirit came to the fore. In 2114, only three months before the Upeo vanished, the Euro-Americans rose up against their Brazilian leaders. It was a quick and carefully staged coup, the mutinous workers taking over key areas of the outpost with minimal bloodshed.

Brazil, unwilling to reveal the facility's true nature, claimed that it was sending resources to quell a miner's strike. It parceled reinforcements in small groups to maintain the cover story. Upeo pilots transported only a few Brazilian squads before the teleporters vanished. As with the other extrasolar colonies after the Upeo disappearance, Averiguas' fate and that of its rebellious colonists remains unknown.

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

Result of Feasibility Study for Colonization of Averiguas in SS3819

This committee recommends that Averiguas not be chosen as an interstellar colony. We predict that, due to the binary star system's nature, the white dwarf star SS3819b will go supernova in the near future, astronomically speaking. This event will virtually atomize the entire solar system, including Averiguas.

Based on spectral analysis of the two stars, and the rate at which matter transfers from the giant to the dwarf, a full supernova event is extremely likely in the next 1,000 to 2,000 years. Furthermore, we cannot anticipate the full potential of the minor nova effects that the dwarf currently exhibits. Averiguas' magnetic field may be insufficient protection against the extreme solar winds produced.

Once again, this committee advises that Averiguas not be chosen.

Eleanora Bordes
Chair, Astronomical Committee
University of Rio de Janeiro

RAFAT INCORPORATED

Corporations of Note

— Excerpt: *Free Enterprise Report* © 2119 Rafat, Inc.

AFRICA

Alpha Software: A mainstream software company based in Cairo. Alpha is best known for its interactive computer agents.

Language Systems, Inc.: The top vocoder manufacturer in settled space. LSI single-handedly controls over 40% of the vocal translator market.

Mashindano: This African vehicle manufacturer's name is synonymous with "reliability." Mashindano's mid-range consumer cars are possibly the most popular in the world.

ASIA

Bakuhatsu: This aerospace company took the world by storm when it emerged from Nippon when the Quarantine was rescinded. Bakuhatsu has become Banji and L-B's primary competitor in only a few decades.

Banji: This Nihonjin metanational, based in Yokohama, is a leading producer of a wide array of devices, from coffeemakers to military aircraft. Banji's reputation is one of rock-solid dependability and impeccable business ethics.

L-B: Formerly two separate North American manufacturers, the parts of L-B merged and crossed the Pacific after the Aberrant War. This top aerospace company has produced quality craft in Shenyang, China for the past century.

Orchidware: This Shanghai-based software company specializes in business-oriented programs and interactive computer agents.

ToshiGinko: The largest financial institution in the world, this Nihonjin metanational maintains its image as a "friendly neighborhood bank" even while backing ruthless takeovers. Close to 25% of all consumer bank accounts are reportedly with ToshiGinko.

Wazukana: The largest computer manufacturer in settled space, Wazukana has major offices in a number of Nihonjin and orbital locations. It controls about 30% of the hardware market and 45% of the software market. Wazukana's dominance is a result of its operators' knack for subsuming young, innovative companies.

AUSTRALIA

FangTech: This Perth-based marine equipment company manufactures over 30% of the world's aquatic craft. Rumors claim FangTech is looking to expand into deep-space mining equipment.

Genman Enterprises: Genman funds seven out of 10 newsflats in Australia, and an impressive 20% system-wide. Although file news isn't as popular as interactive journalism, Genman's newsflats are surprisingly dynamic and current.

Morris Media, Incorporated (MMI): Morris competes with such big-league metanats as Banji and Orgotek. MMI's main interests lie in high-glitz infotainment, but the megamed also explores custom network productions, tailoring broadcasts to individual colonies and settlements.

OBC: A top megamed, OBC's success comes from its family-oriented marketing. Sitcoms, Aberrant-slaying adventure shows and the like make up a large part of OBC's programming.

Rafat, Incorporated: Currently number three behind MMI and OBC. Rafat was a small-time entertainment concern that rose to megamed status based on the strength of its vidflat network, Matinee, as well as syndicated shows and other low-cost productions.

Shendai Pacific: A joint Australian-Nihonjin manufacturer specializing in affordable hover vehicles.

Stahu Entertainment: Smallest of the big five megameds, Stahu Entertainment started in music media. While music remains its strength, Stahu's recent forays into interactive media show promise.

EUROPE

Helvetica International: Helvetica is a 22nd-century descendant of the erstwhile "Swiss Bank," and is privacy oriented and discreet. Legally, it is still based in Zurich-Geneva, but Helvetica's real headquarters is believed to be in Africa.

Reed Rosen: This British automaker specializes in luxury skimmers. It is one of the few European manufacturers that is still in business, due mainly to its high-quality vehicles.

Voss: An Austrian-based weapons manufacturer, Voss specializes in personal laser weaponry — its highly efficient energy cell/optical lens interface device is notably superior to those of other manufacturers.

NORTH AMERICA

Alchemy Computer Corporation: ACC was associated with Orgotek at one time, but the two have become competitors in the biotech market. Rumors posit that Alchemy's theft of a prototype matrix biocomp from Orgotek triggered the rift.

DataWarp: This North American software manufacturer lost much of its market share to

Wazukana, Orchidware and Alpha Software in the past few years. It maintains itself almost exclusively on military contracts. DataWarp is based in Toronto.

Davidson-Wheeler: A small but enduring manufacturer, Davidson-Wheeler manufactures wheeled motorcycles exclusively in its Midwestern plant.

HLY National Finance: A struggling financial metanat compared to the Eastern commercial trading bloc, HLY remains strong in the Western Hemisphere. HLY is involved in hundreds of legitimate development ventures, from blight research to offworld manufacturing.

L-K and **ClinTech:** These two companies are branches of a single weapons manufacturer. L-K produces personal weapons, while ClinTech produces heavy weapons. Both are based in the corporate section of the New D.C. arcology.

Orgotek: The undisputed leader of biotechnology. Although Orgotek has a good reputation among consumers it has faced (and defeated) civil lawsuits over the last three years regarding restraint of trade, accidental deaths and patent violations. Orgotek press releases imply that the suits are sponsored by the FSA military-corporate complex in an attempt to undercut Orgotek's financial livelihood.

Porter-Andersen: P-A is North America's only major remaining automobile manufacturer, with a dozen manufacturing plants in the upper Midwest. Current industry gossip indicates that the company is considering relocating from the Great Lakes region to the stronger markets of Asia.

Steinhardt: The "last American computer manufacturer," Steinhardt supplies many governments (most notably the FSA) with their mainframes. The company has headquarters in the Vancouver arcology.

Tau Ceti Development Corporation (TCDC): Tau Ceti is a start-to-finish emigration support corporation, handling information, transport and resettling services to off-world colonies.

SOUTH AMERICA

Apoderado Designs: This is the up-and-coming computer software company of the decade. Apoderado employs less than 100 people and is based in a renovated warehouse in Rio de Janeiro. It's considered the trendsetter for interactive computer agents.

Aris Armaments: Aris is a Brazilian weapons company with headquarters in São Paulo. It specializes in "exotic" weapons like flechette stingers and sonics.

BioSystems, Inc.: This Columbian company is Orgotek's chief competition in the biotech industry. Associated closely with the Norça, BioSystems focuses on personal, portable bioapplications.

Concurso: This Brazilian-based truck company constructs solid transport and maintenance vehicles for civilian and non-combat military uses.

Kostbaar: Both a person and a metanat, the man known only as Kostbaar is a "post-refugee" fashion designer of Dutch descent. He is the definitive source of good taste in fashion. Kostbaar currently lives in Brazil, but considers himself a citizen of the world (a subtle jab at Proxy Otha Herzog's "man of no nation" claim).

SPACE

Amalgamated Business Interests (ABI): The former WorldBank metanat maintains its large corporate headquarters on Olympus. ABI "diversified its interests," emerging as a major presence in space, both in its growing domination of the water-mining industry and more subtly through client companies and financing.

A.N. DuPres-Mutesa and Company, Inc.: DuPres controls most extraterrestrial metal and mineral-mining operations. Ares, Inc. and the Mercury Mining Consortium are its foremost client companies.

Eclipse Media: This Luna-based megamed gives Australian media agencies a run for their money.

International Consortium on Ecomining (ICE): The largest single water mining corporation next to ABI. ICE is headquartered in a private colony station on Luna.

Luna Firma: The premiere real-estate agency on the Moon, handling 60% of all lunar property transactions.

Offworld Enterprises, Ltd. (OE): Based on *Perelandra Station* orbiting Venus, OE is involved in scientific research and exploratory craft design relating to Earth's sister planet.

Pizza Belle: The most ubiquitous source of fast food in settled space, the Pizza Belle corporate headquarters relocated to Olympus recently.

Stavros Weapon Designs: Stavros is a relatively new weapons manufacturer, based on Luna. It makes cheap, no-frills firearms. Despite their marginal quality, Stavros guns are popular street weapons. It's suspected that the company is little more than a front for black-market trade.

Tangent Technologies: Although new, this popular Olympus-based marketing firm has taken on a number of sizable clients, including Banji, Voss and the UAN.

ALIENS

Since the dawn of history, humanity has stared into the celestial void. Thirteen years ago, in true Nietzchean fashion, the dark between the stars gazed back at us. With the coming of the Qin, then the Chromatics, and finally the Coalition, humanity's very concept of itself has been tilted on its axis and sent spinning into the mysterious sky.

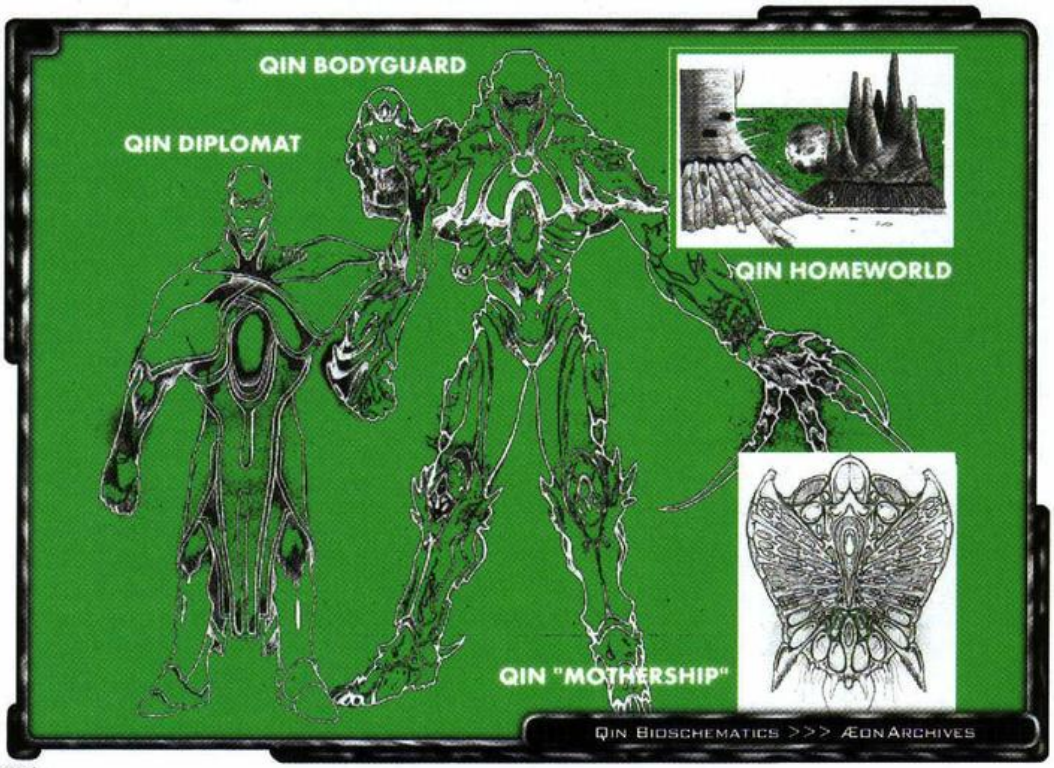
The discovery of life on other worlds, while not quite so shocking as it would have been had humanity never experienced the Aberrant Wars, was nonetheless an epochal event. (The effects on religious belief alone completely changed the demographic base of several major faiths.) In the past 13 years, humanity has advanced its frontiers of knowledge a hundredfold — and learned to live with the looming fear of invasion from the stars.

Thus far, humanity counts a number of new species: the Qin, the Chromatics, and an undisclosed number in the recently discovered Coalition (potentially between five and two dozen species alone). Rumors of another species displaced by Aberrant attacks remain just that: rumors. And then there are the veiled references by the proxies of powers beyond even they, that are somehow their allies. Given how so very upside-down the universe has turned in the past several years, anything is possible.

THE QIN

"With friends like these...."

The punchline has yet to be written for the enigmatic Qin, humanity's for-the-nonce allies among the stars. These quixotic creatures certainly seem friendly — but then again, they seem humanoid and just about everyone's figured out the falsity of that supposition.



Humanity first contacted the Qin 13 years ago, when a Chinese explorer vessel intercepted a transmission of Qin radio static. The psions arranged a rendezvous at the aliens' home system, which later became colloquially known as Qinshui. First contact went well, one supposes, and ambassadors were exchanged; the Qin currently have an embassy on Luna.

We gave them their name: The term "Qin" is Chinese, a reference to a form of Beijing opera. The Qin's stylized, lacquered-looking (and almost certainly artificial) humanoid bodies evoke images of the old plays. They're quick learners: Recently arrived Qin diplomats "wear" bodies that are nearly identical to those of humans. The older ones, though, as well as newcomers remaining "out of the public eye," still display "old-school" bodies: crystalline, shimmering shells that prompted the occasional nickname "icons."

Our biotechnological theories seemed incredibly advanced a decade ago, that is, until the Qin showed us *their* bioware. The Qin don't talk too much about their technology — not in public, anyway — but evidence suggests that they've developed biotechnology to a level that we can barely fathom. Noetic research shows the Qin uniformly possess a baseline telepathic ability that seems to be instrumental in their relationship to bioware. The Qin use their technology routinely to accomplish near-unimaginable feats of macrocosmic construction and terraforming. One would presume they are equally skilled in their technology's military applications — though one hopes humanity will never find out firsthand.

Celebration

— Excerpt: *Luna Sun Times*
© 10.31.2117 Eclipse Media

The smooth, soaring lines of the Qin embassy arched high over last night's celebratory banquet as diplomats, press and the wealthy rubbed elbows with the alien exiles in our midst. Our Qin allies remind us of two things: that races as rich and intriguing as humanity do exist in space, and it is the very vastness of space that strands our cousins with us. The curving hall, walled entirely in the Qin's unique "bioglass," allowed guests the rather peculiar sensation of walking unprotected on the surface of the Moon. Overhead, the organic spires of the upper towers glimmered in the sunlight.

A Qin diplomatic assistant commented that the celebration was one of great importance to their race, but declined to explain further.

RAFAT INCORPORATED

THE QIN COMPACT — DEVIL'S DEAL?

— Orisha Mfune, *Input/Output Special* © 2120 Rafat, Inc.

The First Contact. The Shining Host comes down from the heavens, bearing gifts from the angels on high. The sky opens up in coruscations of light, and beatific ranks of Others descend in drill-corps harmony to pull us up to the celestial firmament.

Great PR. Seems to be about the way the Qin planned it. And if we look around and realize we're not in Heaven yet — well, we're not about to be impolite to our newfound friends, are we?

The coming of the Qin — now this I remember. We all do. You remember where you were on March 23, 2107 — when an angel passed above the world of wars and sanctions and economies and lies, an angel bearing tidings of new life. Remember that week — everything kinda died down a little, like we were a bunch of kids caught fighting in the sandbox and didn't want to look bad now that the grownups were coming to visit. Some people said we should push The Button; some said it was the Rapture, or the Next Wave of Aberrants. Most folks, though, just looked up toward the skies and talked about the Signal.

The Signal. The Aricebo scientists practically wetting themselves on holotransmissions across the solar system as they announced that, yeah, that crackling belch of radio static intercepted by the *Kowloon* actually spiderwebbed out into a deliberate message. The Upeo arranging a rendezvous at Qinshui — how they knew exactly where to go, I'll never know, but never let it be said that you heard me questioning psion motives. The holovids spiraling up and down the conveyor craft — you could almost hear "Thus Spake Zarathustra" in the background.

And the coming of the Qin.

You've heard the phrase "too perfect," I assume. Look at a Qin sometime, then think about that phrase. I mean, you see these guys and it's like looking at a crystalline cataract sugar-spun into human form, as if Botticelli had conjured Venus from the pure spray itself. Huge, expressive eyes that somehow convey nothing. Beatific smiles in happy, vacuous, perfectly proportioned faces.

They average around 6'8" — enough to have presence, not enough to intimidate. They're classically, Barbie-doll angelic, but in a kind of bland way — enough to inspire awe without any troublesome sexual baggage. They come in all kinds of colors — silver, ebony, blue, magenta — thus laying to rest any troublesome racial issues. They're androgynous enough to dispel chauvinistic approaches without being, you know, weird about it.

Of course, they learn any and all languages they need to in a matter of a month or so, then turn around and speak 'em better than most of the natives. They wear clothes, but they don't look so much worn as grown or spun around them, all whorly and bandy and with cool-looking protrusions and flourishes. They come from a world in the thick of the galaxy somewhere, and yeah, they know a little bit about What's Out There, but they haven't gotten any farther than we have…thus laying "evil galactic dictator" fears to rest.

If I were a marketing rep for an alien race, I couldn't put a better spin on these folks.

It's obvious those bodies are like the clothes — spun for public consumption. Debate? Please! Beyond a reasonable doubt. The first contact files may be locked down, but I have it on good authority that the rumors of the Qin really being two-foot long slugs is true. I bet they slurp right inside the head and drive those bodies around like we would a skimmer. The Qin are putting on a show. Don't look behind the screen, Earthlings; it's all done with mirrors.

We know they've got biotech. I mean, the governments — and I'm talking about the *real* governments, not those primped, airbrushed, pixillated holos you vote for — must've been creaming when they got a gander at what these critters could do. We thought we were so high-tech 'cause we could integrate bio-goo with a

fusion engine to make "biofighters." Then the Qin come along and *hand* us bioware techniques that'll let us turn Mars into Vera Cruz in a couple decades. Instead of a thousand-year terraforming project, we're now looking at 75! And the Qin just *hand* this to us, like it's pocket change.

For them, biotech is everything. Ever seen ambassadors' reports? When the Qin want anything — a new suit, a new weapon (and remember that — these angels do have guns), a new road, a new city — they just grow it. Yeah, throw your magic crystals in the water, my friends, and conquer the world.

They even use it for travel, surrounding themselves in organic carapaces, then linking together into vast, spaceworthy living robots. They don't need to "build the tools to build the tools" — they *are* the tools. If they need to make something — or to help us make something — they just get enough Qin, form themselves into gargantua, and build what they need. Like Amish folks gathering to build a barn, except they build whole cities this way. I wonder if the carapaces are anthropomorphic because it's convenient from an engineering point of view, or because they know we're taping and they don't want us to freak out.

Ever heard the Story of the Sphinx? Yeah, that big stone thing in Egypt. Well, archaeologists think that the Sphinx's serene, pharaoh-looking head is actually a later innovation — that the thing was there before the Egyptians, and when they got there, they chiseled off the original face and replaced it with something more...what? Suitable?

Or less disturbing?

They are "icons" indeed, mirrors reflecting what they want us to see, which is what we want to see. The problem is, if there's one thing I know about good old *Homo sapiens*, it's that we're never content with our icons. We want to break them, to scratch the paint, tarnish the chrome and see just what's behind the mirror. And somehow I don't think our guests will much care for that. And then I think of those build-it-yourself colossi, and how they pulverize rock with a punch, and I imagine....

Well, I'll spare you the paranoid jingoism, boys and girls. That's all for now.

CHROMATIC BIOSCHEMATIC >>> ÆON ARCHIVES

THE CHROMATICS

Seemingly conjured from the recesses of a B-grade horror vid, the Chromatics have whipped human xenophobia to frightening heights. Perhaps this is because they embody our primordial fears of the Evil Invaders — merciless, inscrutable, grotesque. They give even the Aberrants a run for their money in this regard.

Since the Chromatics' initial "Pearl Harbor" assault on the Karroo Mining Colony in 2113, we've learned little about them save their military strategy — and even that is mostly a cipher. Psions' encounters with them before the Upeo wa Macho vanished (thus breaking our contact) indicated that the Chromatics have nothing but violent intentions, even hatred for humans. Unfortunate — though they're far from pretty by our standards, the Chromatics are a fascinating race.

· PROTEUS ARCHIVE ·

— Testimony of Major David deBeers, UAN Military Forces

The bastards came out of nowhere! I mean, we were checking out one of the mining planetoids and came across a pack of 'em — you know, all lit up for war, with those tool-harnesses and whatnot. Well, I couldn't tell what they were thinking — if you can read an expression on those turnips they call faces, I wish you'd clue me in. I went with what I could read — the stance, and the leveled weapons that look like cheap knock-offs of Orgotek bioguns. So we engaged, and...well, it seemed our weapons were useless, because when we cut into 'em, it was like firing into air.

And then we got mowed down from behind. Hell, we'd scanned the area, and I swear with what's left of my right arm that nothing was behind us all dayside. And there the things were, popped out of nowhere, all warbling while those light-blasters were chopping us to hell.

Bastards. I say we find where they live, dump the psions on the planet, and let 'em wipe each other out.

Studying human-Chromatic encounters and recovered alien bodies, the Trinity confirms that Chromatics are definitely sentient beings and not simply clever animals. They seem to have developed a complex system of bioluminescent organs that produce light in an array of hues. This apparently serves as their primary means of communication, and was the inspiration for the appellation we've applied to them. Their language appears to be highly sophisticated, even if the Chromatics themselves aren't. Attack survivors say these aliens use a variety of tools, although the Chromatics seem to have no concept of clothing. Their accessories are entirely functional, but serve mainly to supplement the race's inherent capabilities.

Indeed, most fascinating of all about the aliens is that they can control — psionically, it appears — internal and ambient light emission. They've been known to manipulate light, shaping it into blinding flashes and laser beams — and even bending it entirely to create a kind of holographic blending. While the electrokinetics are curious to learn how the Chromatics accomplish such an advanced feat, the majority of humanity is more interested in learning what has become of those people stranded with these warlike aliens. Now that the jump-ship technology is complete and the first psions are sent out to the frontier, we will finally discover how the colonists in the Crab Nebula fared against these relentless warriors over the past five years.

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

THE INVISIBLE MENACE

— Professor Clara Riccio, Æon Trinity, Proteus Division

A favorite subject of fiction and film, creating a "cloaking device" to render people or objects invisible has long been a goal of science. With the revelation of psi powers, many assumed such a power wouldn't be far behind. This capability to create a kind of invisibility seemed to fall under certain electrokinetics' ability to manipulate light waveforms.

To their chagrin, however, this power remains beyond these psions' reach. Apparently, bending light waves around a three-dimensional form while still enabling that form to see out — not to mention adequately maintaining the cloak's resolution while tracking the user's movement — involves a staggering number of variables and a significant amount of psi energy.

Disturbingly, studies of the Chromatics' attacks seem to indicate the aliens may possess some level of cloaking or perhaps merely blending ability. Unfortunately, the reports available are rather dated and the few Chromatic bodies still undergoing study have yet to reveal conclusive information.

Analysis: "Operation Abyss"

With regard to the perpetrators of the incident at the Karroo Mining Colony, we urge caution, not only because of lack of knowledge of the species' capabilities, but also due to lack of understanding, which could precipitate a futile and unnecessary conflict. The concept of the "bug-eyed monster" is a fiction, a fantasy best left to the confines of the theatre, and we encourage military forces to lay cultural biases aside when dealing with a very critical real-life situation.

We have taken the liberty of studying the specimen General Abasa was kind enough to provide. Our observations follow herein.

It is unquestionably a carbon-based life form; amino acid structure and cell composition display fundamental similarities to our own, though the acids themselves differ from our own guanine, cytosine, *et al*. Certainly the entity's superficial parameters, though perhaps grotesque to a casual observer, will comfort those researchers who postulate that, given the existence of certain fundamental laws of physics, organic life develops in similar patterns throughout the known universe.

First, some general parameters. Height: roughly 1.75 meters, though the flexible notochord and extendible neck structure evidently allow for considerable fluctuation even among individuals. Weight: This specimen weighs 81.7 kilograms. Bipedal posture and three-fingered opposable thumb structure, though the digits of the hand structures are less developed than our own, while the digits of the foot structures are more developed. We postulate an evolution from a species of climbers, though the thickened skin of the soles further leads us to speculate that this organism evolved among rocks and crags.

It is an aerobic organism. In addition, certain enlarged pore structures in the skin lead me to believe that it has the capability for os-

"Second Contact" > Da Ve.A.I. > Zweidler Collection

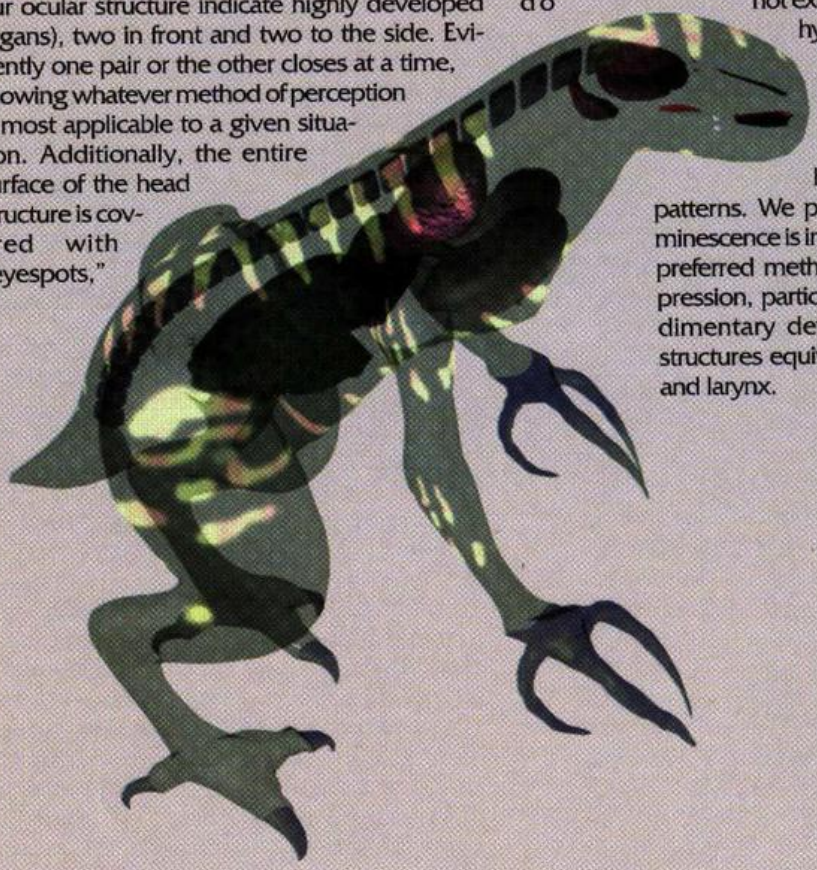
motic absorption of oxygen in a liquid medium.

The "tubes" running down the back: undoubtedly structures similar to those of the extinct Dimetrodon, used for storing ambient light or heat and converting it to caloric energy. This would indicate the presence of such sources on the creature's home world, or a dearth of prey species, forcing the creature to conserve energy.

The head structure displays advanced visual apparatus. Whereas human beings evolved a binocular vision, allowing for depth perception at the expense of wide angle focus common to deer and the like, these creatures have maintained both. They have four eyes (position and number of rods and cones in comparison to our ocular structure indicate highly developed organs), two in front and two to the side. Evidently one pair or the other closes at a time, allowing whatever method of perception is most applicable to a given situation. Additionally, the entire surface of the head structure is covered with "eyespots," enabling the creature to perceive light, shade and movement from all directions.

Interestingly, the being has two brains. The first, located in the head cavity, is smaller and seems solely dedicated to the creature's extensive sensory capabilities. The second is located in the torso with the other organs; I conjecture that this is dedicated to handling the rest of the being's processes, including higher thought functions.

And the vaunted "lights"? Just that. Bioluminescent organs of amazing complexity — as though one of Earth's angler fish had evolved to the point at which it is capable of language. We do not exaggerate on this last hypothesis — electro-convulsive stimulation of the epidermis produces a remarkable range of hues, intensities and patterns. We postulate that bioluminescence is indeed the creature's preferred method of linguistic expression, particularly given the rudimentary development of the structures equivalent to our palate and larynx.



Coalition Ship >>> Yi Bridge Monitor

THE COALITION

When deep space probes reported a huge object headed rapidly toward our solar system at near-light speeds, panic was understandable. Aberrant raids showed no sign of slacking off, and it had been almost six years since the Upeo disappeared. Was this thing an Aberrant fleet, a Chromatic warship or something worse? The United Nations, with Æon Trinity assistance, authorized dispatching one of the new experimental jump ships on an intercept course with the approaching object. This expedition resulted in the (by now traditional) good news/bad news. The good news is that, while it is indeed a ship of massive scale, it isn't one of our known enemies. The bad news is that we don't know yet if these beings are our friends. Considering the severe information blackout, it may be some time before we find out for certain.

The little the Trinity knows is based on hearsay and scattered pieces of information. Despite our direct involvement in coordinating the jump ship's intercept, the UN has locked down all data regarding these aliens. Still, based on what Æon has uncovered, it seems we humans must redefine our place in the universe. Encounters with the single alien races of Qin and Chromatics were bizarre enough, but what to make of encountering an entire confederation of alien species? For that is what this alien "Coalition" seems to be — a collection of various races, each with a regimented place within a larger sociopolitical structure. Investigating UN data nodes indicates that Earth governments don't yet know of the exact number of Coalition races. Preliminary reports, seemingly little more than guesses, estimate between a half-dozen to over a hundred.

Such files mention "Envoys," a race of bipeds astonishing in their blandness but who seem to speak for the Coalition, as well as towering nine-foot-tall monsters called "Spinals" seemingly dreamed up by a lunatic with a phobia of sea urchins, and lumbering, bear-like creatures labeled "Sasqs" who apparently handle the Coalition's maintenance tasks. The Trinity knows of little beyond this sparse information, but there doesn't seem to be much more to know. Contact has thus far been as tentative as it has been titillating — the Coalition evidently holds very...alien views with regard to reproduction.

With all of these fascinating factors to pursue, one wonders why the UN locked down first contact data so severely, restricting even Æon involvement. All anyone has seen is the initial transmission of the Coalition's "space ark." What does the UN not want us to know?

PROTEUS ARCHIVE

Case Number: 69-1131
Date: 12.3.2119
Patient: Captain Li Hu
Physician: Dr. Lynn Golden

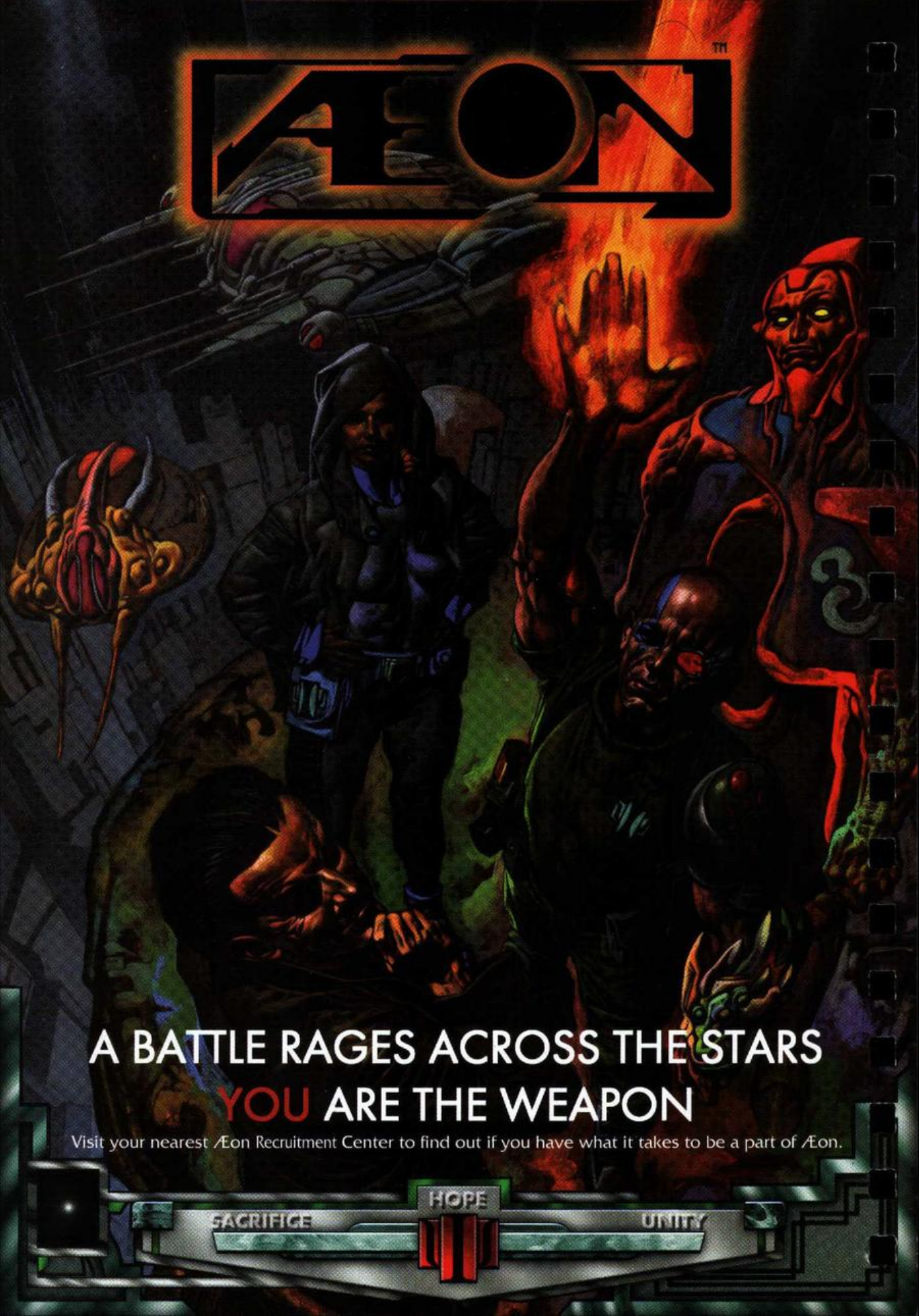
I am pleased to note some progress in the captain's condition. Today he spoke, breaking the autistic silence under which he had lain, in spite of drugs and hypnosis, since the rescue team found him huddled in the bridge of the *Yi*.

He still speaks in single words and phrases, his mental processes and brainwave activity are erratic, and certain responses indicate the presence of pronounced phobic abnormalities. Nonetheless, I was able to coax intelligible responses from him.

From a geopolitical standpoint, Captain Li's report is significant indeed. His testimony indicates the discovery of a new alien species — one or several, it is unclear from his report.

From a psychological standpoint, this "first contact" was a close encounter of a most disastrous kind. I believe you will understand when I advise against disclosing certain details to the media.

To put it bluntly, many of the crew were done to death in a fashion that I can only interpret as rape.


AEON
A BATTLE RAGES ACROSS THE STARS
YOU ARE THE WEAPON
Visit your nearest Æon Recruitment Center to find out if you have what it takes to be a part of Æon.
HOPE
SACRIFICE
UNITY

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The Basics

Æon is set in the early 22nd century. Humanity has ventured into the stars and discovered strange aliens and malevolent cosmic forces. While much like our own reality in many ways, the **Æon** universe proposes a future that confirms the existence of psionic powers and extraterrestrial life.

The **Æon** cosmos is, at its foundation, a game, but a game about telling stories. If you've played other roleplaying games, you should already be familiar with the idea. If not, this section explains what it all means.

Storytelling

Telling stories is a part of our heritage. The oral tradition is the oldest method of communicating information and entertainment. As society progressed and became more diverse and sophisticated, so too did storytelling. Unfortunately it also became more passive. Where our ancestors took turns telling one another tales, we now watch stories on television.

Yet there are still storytellers among us. The filmmakers who create movies and the writers who create novels are just a few of those who maintain this ancient art. **Æon** is all about *telling* stories, not just listening to them. It's an opportunity to create new legends — not to merely watch as old legends are recycled on screen.

Roleplaying

Æon is a *roleplaying* game; players assume the roles of central characters in an ongoing story. It's much like improvisational acting with a dash of "Cops and Robbers." The make-believe you played as a child — imagining yourself as a knight in shining armor or a brightly clad superhero — was roleplaying. **Æon** is simply a more sophisticated version of those childhood games.

Still, **Æon** needs a few more rules than the playground did; "Got you!" "Did not!" "Did too!" is too simplistic for this sort of game. **Æon**'s rules set the story's parameters, allowing the Storyteller to determine each character's abilities and limits. Rules guide the story, eliminating conflict over whether or not a character's actions are plausible — but rules *don't* dictate or restrict the action. The next chapter covers the basic systems for play. However, like the subsequent chapters, even these rules always emphasize story over mechanics.

Designed for cinematic storytelling, **Æon** is much like a movie. The game works best when focusing on only a few main characters; only a half-dozen or so players is recommended. Much of the game's intensity and excitement is lost with larger groups, in which players must compete for attention.

The Storyteller

Æon has more in common with plays than with card or board games. Most notably, one player, called the *Storyteller*, is a "director" of sorts. In fact, the Storyteller acts as a combination director, narrator and referee, creating the drama through which the players take their characters.

As a Storyteller, you do nothing less than create the environment in which the characters are placed. While players and Storyteller shape events together, you are responsible for tying the story's disparate threads together and making sure that the game runs smoothly. Your most useful tools in balancing story and game are your imagination and the rules systems. Storytelling **Æon** is challenging, but this book makes it a simpler and more enjoyable process. It's a formidable job, but it can be incredibly rewarding — after all, the reward is the story itself.

The Storyteller's role is explored in detail in **Chapter Seven: Storytelling**, page 290.

The Players

Most of the people playing **Æon** assume the roles of the story's protagonists. While the Storyteller sets the stage for the game, it is the *players* who take the stage and create the action there. Being a player demands effort and preparation, but these elements add richness and depth to the story.

As a player of **Æon**, you create a character with incredible mental powers — a psion. You decide the character's actions over the course of a story as if you were playing a protagonist in a novel or film. Everything you have your character say and do has an impact in the **Æon** universe. Your goal is to help the protagonist overcome the obstacles facing her, thereby achieving her objectives.

After you describe "your" action, the Storyteller will occasionally demand that you roll dice to see if your character succeeds in the attempt. Beyond that, you need only think back to when you played make-believe — it's that simple.

Characters

To play **Æon** you create a role and become that person within the context of the game. Just as actors play characters on stage, players are the protagonists in an improvisational story.

While a playwright's characters have a predetermined existence, the **Æon** character you create develops according to your desires. The character creation process is relatively simple; it takes only a half-hour or so to work out the traits and

ratings that designate the character's capabilities. Even so, a character is nothing but a collection of numbers on a piece of paper until you breathe life into it.

Character creation is covered in **Chapter Two: Character**, page 163.

The Game

There are no "winners" or "losers" in **Æon**. The idea is not to "beat" the other players, as having everyone's characters cooperate is often essential to your own character's survival. Nor is the goal to "beat" the Storyteller, since the Storyteller and players work together to create the best story possible. In the end, the idea is to rise to the challenge, striving to overcome cosmic forces with your powers, wits and courage.

Although this setting's main focus is humanity's struggle against the once-human abominations called Aberrants, **Æon** is designed for players to pursue any number of goals. You can explore any concepts that interest you. Your series of stories may deal with this epic conflict or may involve exploring the frontiers of space, interacting with aliens or investigating political maneuverings on Earth. As in real life, the choice is yours.

Æon's "victory conditions" are less tangible than being the only player who isn't bankrupt, or cornering your opponent in checkmate. Success in **Æon** may come about for a number of reasons: defeating foes in the course of the story, achieving certain status within an order, developing a previously untapped aptitude, uncovering an Aberrant plot or simply enjoying the experience of playing in the game.

There is no official "end" to a storytelling game, merely breaks between game sessions. Each time the players gather, the story picks up again just like another episode in an on-going TV series or another chapter in a novel.

Playing Aids

Æon is designed for play around a table. You need little besides this book, some 10-sided dice (also called "d10s"), photocopies of the character sheet, pencils and paper for taking notes — and, of course, your imagination.

Still, other props can make the roleplaying experience more vivid. Mood lighting, music, scribbled notes or sketches; all can serve to make the game seem more real. Remember, though, that props are just that; it's the story that matters.

Live-Action

Live-action roleplaying is a natural outgrowth of the "tabletop" storytelling described above. Live-action is even more like improvisational theater; the actors (the players) literally act through the scenes. This can create a very intense and immediate storytelling experience.

In live-action roleplaying, you don't just describe your character's actions; you "are" that character. You actually do what the character does (within reason). Whether that's simply walking across a room or carousing in a spaceport, you are physically involved in the action. Imagination is still important, and the Storyteller may still interrupt events to describe objects and special situations.

No dice are used in live-action games; alternate rules (like those in White Wolf's **Mind's Eye Theatre** game products, or simply the result of the Storyteller's judgment), replace dice. The method of adjudicating actions itself isn't important as long as it's consistent, fair and fun for everyone.

Rules of Live-Action

You must follow a few essential rules to ensure that live-action roleplaying is safe and enjoyable for all. These rules must be obeyed in any live-action activity; safety is always the primary concern.

- **Don't Touch:** Players may never actually strike or grapple one another. No combat should ever be performed — that's what the "dice" are for. If anyone gets too rambunctious, the Storyteller should call for a timeout and remind everyone of the rules. Repeat offenders should be asked to leave, or the action should be returned to a tabletop roleplay forum.
- **No Weapons:** No props can be used if they must touch another player to be effective. No real weapons or realistic-looking props (like guns or swords) of any sort are allowed at any time during live-action sessions.
- **Respect People Who Aren't Playing:** Play in a private area where only the players are around (your house, a reserved room on campus or a rented hall). Never perform live roleplay if passersby may be confused or frightened by the event. If nonplayers are around, understand that they probably have no idea what you're doing. Be discrete and considerate; respect their space and don't force them to participate (pausing to explain that you're playing a game is also a good idea).
- **Know When to Stop:** Remember: It's just a game. When anyone calls for a timeout, all action must cease immediately. If the game gets too intense for someone, it's time to stop.

Glossary

The following is a number of terms used in the rules that new players may not be familiar with. Each is described in more detail elsewhere in this book.

Character Terms

- **Ability:** A Trait describing learning, knowledge or applied experience in a given area. Abilities are added to Attributes to determine your character's Skill Total.
- **Allegiance:** The order, government or organization to which your character belongs.

• **Aptitude:** A category of psionic powers. Each Aptitude consists of specialized types of powers called Modes. Characters have only one Aptitude each, but often have multiple Modes within that Aptitude.

• **Attunement:** Your character's ability to sense the flow of psionic energy around her.

• **Attribute:** A Trait that describes your character's basic characteristics; a reflection of raw, natural capability.

• **Extras:** The characters (created and played by the Storyteller) with whom the team interacts, from simple passersby and bit characters to trusted allies and dangerous enemies.

• **Group:** The players who adopt the personas of characters involved in the stories told.

• **Mode:** A specialized group of psionic powers within an Aptitude.

• **Nature:** Your character's core being, her emotional personality.

• **Psi:** A measure of your character's psionic power.

• **Quality:** A remarkable aspect of one or more of your character's Attributes.

• **Skill Total:** The combined rating of an Ability and its base Attribute. Skill Total determines the number of dice you roll (called a "Dice Pool") when your character performs an action.

• **Specialty:** An area of expertise within an Ability.

• **Storyteller:** The person who creates and guides the game by assuming the roles of all characters not taken by the players, and the person who determines all events beyond the players' control.

• **Team:** Specifically refers to the characters *within* the game, not the individuals playing them.

• **Trait:** Any Attribute, Ability, Advantage or other index with a rating.

• **Willpower:** Your character's self-confidence and moral center.

Rules Terms

• **Action,** also **Dice Action:** Performing a task (a consciously willed activity). When you announce that your character is doing something, she's taking an action. This is also called a "dice action" when you must roll dice (known as a "Dice Pool") to determine whether or not your character succeeds in an action. Most actions are "standard actions"; see below.

• **Action, Difficult:** A task more challenging than normal. See **Difficulty**.

• **Action, Multiple:** Taking more than one action in a turn. The first action's Dice Pool is reduced by a number of dice equal to the total number of actions your character will take in the turn. Each following action loses an additional die (cumulative).

• **Action, Resisted:** An action that two or more characters take against one another. Rolls are made for each against Traits designated by the Storyteller, and the character with the most successes wins.

• **Action, Standard:** An action with no difficulty modifiers. You simply roll your Dice Pool and tally any successes. All tasks your character performs are standard actions unless the Storyteller declares otherwise (by applying a difficulty, noting multiple actions or stating that the action is resisted).

• **Botch:** A notable and often dramatic failure when attempting an action.

• **Dice Pool:** The total number of dice available to you for a given action. Your Dice Pool is equal to the Skill Total most applicable to the action taken. If your character doesn't have an Ability rating in a task, you default to the base Attribute involved and use its score instead of a Skill Total.

• **Difficulty:** Short for the "difficulty of the roll," a difficulty notes the added challenge involved in accomplishing a task. You must roll the standard base of one success plus the additional difficulty indicated (usually by the Storyteller) to accomplish a difficult action.

• **Dots:** The method used to indicate rating values. Each dot equals a die that may be used to perform actions.

• **Rating:** A numbered Trait value; usually a range from 0 to 5, though sometimes from 0 to 10 (often noted in numbers of "dots").

• **Success:** A die that rolls equal to or higher than the Target Number of 7. Most actions require only one success; more challenging actions demand more successes.

• **Success, Extra:** Any successes you roll beyond the minimum required to accomplish an action. Extra successes may be used to make a standard success truly inspired.

• **Success, Standard:** Rolling exactly the number of successes required to accomplish an action.

• **System:** A specific set of game mechanics used in a certain situation; rules to help guide dice-rolling resolutions to simulate dramatic actions.

• **Target Number:** The standard rating of 7 which you must roll or exceed for your character to succeed in a dice action.

Chance exists; it's impossible to avoid. Despite our best efforts, circumstances are often beyond our control. It's true in real life, just as it's true in games — especially in storytelling games that reflect real life. The systems in this chapter provide a structure by which matters of chance are resolved in **Æon**.

These rules are quite simple; however, you shouldn't feel constrained by them. Diverging from the basic systems will increase the likelihood of debate in your game. Be flexible with your adjustments and be consistent when you make changes. Also, remember that simple is often best.

The Golden Rule

The first rule of **Æon** is simply: *If you don't like it, change it.* The story is more important than any rule. If the systems get in the way, ignore or change them. These rules are merely guidelines; feel free to use, alter or disregard them as you see fit — after all, it's your story. Note that the Storyteller is the final arbiter of any rules question.

Time

Time is a fundamental element of **Æon**. There are four distinct ways to describe divisions of time, progressing from the smallest to the largest unit.

- **Turn** — The smallest unit of time in the game, considered long enough to take one *action*. A *turn* is defined as about three seconds in combat situations, although a turn of up to three minutes is acceptable in less dramatic circumstances.
- **Scene** — One compact period of action and roleplaying that takes place in a single location. A *scene* is comparable to a scene in a movie. It takes as few or as many turns to resolve events as are necessary.
- **Episode** — One independent part of a *series*, often played in one game session, made up of scenes connected by *downtime*.
- **Series** — A complete tale, with an introduction, buildup and climax, that often takes several episodes to complete. Your *series* is the continuing narrative that your cast creates. Also called the *story*.
- **Downtime** — The time between scenes or episodes that characters may spend resting, recuperating or possibly learning new talents. Any time that characters are not actively participating in a story is considered *downtime*.

Actions

Characters take lots of *actions* in the course of a story. Players may act out conversations or simply describe actions to the Storyteller. An action can be anything from having a discussion to fending off an Aberrant.

Some actions, such as talking, walking and other simple physical deeds, are *automatic*, not requiring dice rolls. Other maneuvers, mostly those related to combat, are called *dice* actions, and demand that you roll dice to determine the outcome.

See **Complications**, page 159, for information regarding specific types of actions.

Movement

Your character's actions may depend on how far she can move. These rules keep formulas to a minimum, so the ones for determining movement are fairly simple. A *walking* character moves five meters. A *running* character moves her Dexterity rating +12 meters. A *sprinting* character moves (3 x Dexterity) +20 meters.

Movement is often an automatic action, but a character can take no other action that turn if she moves the entire distance that she's able to. A character may typically move half her running distance and still perform a dice action. Moving under hazardous conditions (combat, rough terrain) may also call for a dice roll.

Dice

Æon requires a few 10-sided dice, which you can find in any game store. Sharing dice between players is perfectly acceptable, but can slow things down at times. If you prefer your own dice, you'll want around 10 (the Storyteller will more than likely want her own dice).

Trait Ratings

A character's *Traits* — innate and learned capabilities, called *Attributes*, *Abilities* and *Aptitudes* — are defined by a number of *dots*. Traits are rated from one to five dots; • indicates a mediocre level of skill, while ••••• indicates the absolute peak of human capability. Trait ratings are recorded by filling in the appropriate dots on the character sheet.

x	Abysmal
•	Poor
••	Average
•••	Good
••••	Exceptional
•••••	Superb

Rolling Dice and Dice Pools

When your character takes a dice action, you roll one die for every dot in the Traits most

suited to that task. The Storyteller decides which are the best Traits simply by choosing the *Ability* that best covers the action being attempted.

Attributes (innate capabilities) and *Abilities* (things you know and have learned) have individual ratings, but are added together to determine a *Skill Total*. If your character has a 3 Perception and you put two dots in Awareness, your Awareness Skill Total is 5. Whenever your character performs an Awareness-related action, you roll five dice.

This Skill Total (also called a *Dice Pool*) is recorded on the character sheet in the square with each Ability. The Dice Pool is the total number of dice you roll for a single action. Characters usually perform only one action in a turn, although you may wish to try more than one (see **Multiple Actions**, below).

Each Dice Pool derives from a single Skill Total, and *defaults* to the appropriate Attribute if the character has no rating in an Ability. The only exceptions are Dice Pools figured from **Personality Traits** (see page 190).

Default Traits

On occasion your character may not have a rating in an Ability that the Storyteller designates. If so, you *default* to the Attribute on which the Ability is based. So if the Storyteller calls for an Awareness roll, but you put no points in that Ability, you simply use your character's rating in Perception. This system reflects the idea that someone who improves upon her natural capability through training will generally perform better than someone who tries to get by purely on raw talent.

Personality Traits

Two Traits have no Abilities related to them — *Willpower* and *Psi*. Each Trait has both a *permanent* and *current* rating. The permanent rating (designated by dots on the character sheet) usually stays the same. However, the character's current rating (noted by the squares on the character sheet) can fluctuate during an episode. Dice actions using Personality Traits are based on the character's permanent scores (the dots) not the current ratings (the squares).

Personality Traits are discussed in more detail in **Chapter Three: Traits**, starting on page 190.

Success and Failure

When you roll your Dice Pool, you want each die to match or exceed the *Target Number*. **The Target Number is *always* 7**. So each die that comes up an 7, 8, 9 or 0 (10) is considered a *success*. A success is just that — a positive result, a successful resolution. Conversely, if all the dice you roll come up less than a 7, your action fails.

All you have to know when you roll is the number of successes you need; if you get at least the minimum quantity, you succeed. The standard number of successes necessary for any task is always one (unless the Storyteller says otherwise). *Extra successes* beyond the minimum can sometimes be used for additional effect (at the very least, extra successes mean your character accomplishes the action in a superior and notable fashion). See **Complications**, below, for information regarding easier and more difficult actions.

Total Successes Rolled	Degree of Success
One	Standard
Two	Superior
Three	Remarkable
Four	Astonishing
Five	Phenomenal

For Example: *Hiroko Foster notices an enforcer who works for Valentine Cleff lounging outside her flat. Not wanting to get involved in the black-market organ trade, Hiroko sneaks out the back. Stealth is the obvious Trait to use and the Storyteller asks for a standard roll. Hiroko's Stealth Skill Total is 5, so her player rolls five dice and needs to get at least one success. The player gets: 3, 5, 6, 8 and 0. Hiroko not only succeeds, she does so with an extra success, slipping past the enforcer with ease.*

Complications

It isn't difficult to get at least one success, even with only a couple of dice. If your group is heavily into roleplaying, the simple rolls described above serve to move the game along with a minimum of distraction. The options below serve to accent the game's action and cinematic qualities with an added level of complexity, but are still designed for smooth gameplay.

Option: Cross-Matching Attributes and Abilities

Æon's Attribute/Ability combinations match up the most appropriate Attribute to a given Ability; this helps greatly in streamlining game play. Still, the Storyteller may decide that a more appropriate Attribute/Ability match is called for under certain unusual circumstances.

On these rare occasions, the Storyteller may ask for a cross-matched roll simply by declaring the Attribute and Ability combination he feels is most suitable (this is the only time that the Storyteller need call for the Attribute as well as the Ability to be used). You then take each Attribute rating and Ability rating (*not* Skill Total) and add them together; this is your Dice Pool for that roll. Cross-matching should happen only rarely, when the Storyteller feels it adds to the plot.

For Example: *Astin Marko hears a scuffle in an alleyway and sees a pair of slummers accosting someone. Wanting to get their measure before he wades in, Astin tries identifying the punks' fighting style. The Storyteller thinks Martial Arts is appropriate, but it really calls for an Intelligence test. Instead of using his normal Martial Arts Skill Total [Dexterity + Martial Arts], Astin's player combines his 3 Intelligence and 2 Martial Arts for a total of five dice.*

Botches

Normally if none of your dice roll a 7 or higher, your character simply fails. If any dice on such a failed roll come up 1s, you've *botched.* A botch is an unfortunate result; not only does your character fail the action, but she does so rather significantly. *However, as long as you roll at least one success, any 1s are ignored.*

The specific circumstances of a botch are up to the Storyteller, but they should affect the character adversely and should relate to the action being attempted. A botch's severity depends on the total number of 1s rolled; the more botches you roll, the worse the disaster. While a single botch may result in only temporary distress, a major botch should result in a spectacular problem.

Total Botches Rolled	Degree of Botch
One	Embarrassing
Two	Unfortunate
Three	Severe
Four	Disastrous
Five	Catastrophic

For Example: *Hiroko heads for a nearby magtrain terminal. The Storyteller asks for an Awareness roll. Hiroko doesn't have any points in Awareness and defaults to her 4 Perception. Rolling four dice, her player gets 1, 3, 4 and 6: a botch. The Storyteller decides Hiroko is so pleased with slipping past Valentine's enforcer that she not only fails to see another enforcer in the terminal, but Hiroko runs right into the thug!*

Automatic Successes

Your character may be so skilled in a certain task that you need not roll for it. At the Storyteller's discretion, your character has an *automatic success* if her Skill Total for an action is at least equal to the Target Number of 7. So if you have eight dice or more, your character succeeds automatically — you don't even need to roll. Still, it's merely a standard success; you might want to roll anyway to achieve extra successes.

You may also spend a Willpower point to earn an automatic success. This "free" success is in addition to any successes gained by rolling dice, but the Willpower point must be spent prior to your roll. You won't want to do this too often. While Willpower points are easy to spend, they're not easy to earn. Only one Willpower point may be spent per turn to gain a free success.

Difficulty and Difficult Actions

Most of the time you need only one success to complete an action. However, some tasks, like performing a trick shot or disabling an encrypted lock, can be more challenging. The Storyteller declares *difficult actions* when appropriate, designating a certain number of successes that you need to roll for your character to complete the task. The *difficulty* to a roll is always listed as a number of additional successes needed beyond the standard one. So a "+2 to difficulty" means you must get a total of *three* successes. The harder the action being attempted, the more successes that are needed. Any extra successes you get *beyond* the difficulty indicate that your character does an even more outstanding job than required.

Difficulty Rating	Degree of Difficulty
Zero	Standard
+1	Tough
+2	Challenging
+3	Difficult
+4	Critical

For Example: *Hiroko runs from the magtrain terminal, the enforcer hot on her heels. A hovercycle turns the corner casually. Hoping for a fast getaway, Hiroko jumps for the cycle. The Storyteller decides that landing on a moving bike is tricky, and declares +2 to difficulty. Hiroko has a 6 Athletics, so her player needs to get three successes on six dice. She rolls: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9. With three successes, Hiroko lands on the cycle, grabbing the surprised driver around his waist.*

Extended Actions

Some tasks require multiple successes to complete. These *extended actions* often take more than one turn to complete, although not always. The additional successes are cumulative, reflecting that sustained effort is needed to accomplish the action. You can keep trying to obtain successes until you gather the required amount or until you botch. If you botch during an extended action, the Storyteller may decide that you lose a "saved" success for each botch, or that you lose them all and must start again from scratch — or even that you messed up so badly that you can't try again.

Extended actions are more complicated than standard actions, and should seldom be employed in the middle of intense roleplaying. The action in the game should reflect what types of rolls are needed, not the other way around.

For Example: *Noticing the commotion Hiroko is causing, the thug posted outside her flat takes advantage of the distraction and breaks into Hiroko's apartment. Since he's hired muscle, not a burglar, the thug decides to break down the door. The Storyteller figures the thug must get a total of four successes in an extended action to snap a solid lock. The enforcer has a 7 Might, so his player rolls seven dice. He gets an abysmal 1, 2, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 9; the door buckles slightly but doesn't give. On his next turn, the player rolls 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. The four successes this turn plus the one from the previous turn are more than enough to send the door crashing back on its hinges.*

Multiple Actions

Your character can also perform *multiple actions* in a turn. The total number of actions the character takes is how many dice are subtracted from the first task attempted in that turn. Each action after the first loses an additional die beyond that amount (cumulative). So if your character tries to perform three actions in a turn, you subtract three dice from the first task's Dice Pool, four from the second, and five from the third. If the total actions bring your Dice Pool for any one task to zero, that action cannot be attempted.

For Example: *Back on the street, Hiroko's having trouble getting the irate cycle driver to flee the scene while the enforcer simultaneously takes aim on them with a netgun. Short on time, Hiroko performs two actions: shooting at the enforcer and intimidating the driver. With two actions, Hiroko's player subtracts two from her 6 Firearms Ability (rolling four dice for: 2, 5, 5 and 6) and three from her 4 Intimidation (rolling one die for: 0). Hiroko's stunner shot misses the thug, but the weapon's scream combined with Hiroko's shouting startles the driver. He cranks the throttle and, turbines roaring, the hovercycle tears off down a side alley.*

Resisted Actions

Sometimes your character's efforts will oppose another's, just like in a tug of war. In *resisted actions* you each make rolls using the appropriate Traits. If you score more successes than your opponent does, your character succeeds at her action before the other character does. Your total successes are then reduced by the amount that your opponent rolled; the successes remaining are used for the action itself. In this way, even if your opponent can't beat you, she can diminish your efforts.

For Example: *The hovercycle driver's surprise lasts only for a moment, and he tries to bring the bike to a stop. Hiroko reaches forward and tightens her grip over the driver's, hoping to force the throttle back up. The Storyteller calls for both to make Might rolls. The characters are evenly matched with no Might Ability and 2 Strength ratings. The Storyteller rolls for the driver, getting 5 and 8. Hiroko's player rolls 8 and 9. While the driver resists her, Hiroko has just enough leverage to goose the bike's speed back up.*

Some actions are both extended *and* resisted. One opponent must collect a certain number of successes in order to win. All successes rolled above the opponent's total number of successes in a single turn are added together. The first opponent to collect a designated number of successes wins the contest.

For Example: *Hiroko's impromptu chauffeur loses his temper and tries throwing Hiroko off the bike. The Storyteller states that whomever gets three successes first on resisted Might rolls stays on the hovercycle, while the losing character gets tossed to the ground. In the first turn, the Storyteller rolls for the driver and gets 3 and 9; Hiroko's player comes up with 4 and 6. In the second turn, the Storyteller's roll is 7 and 8; Hiroko's player gets 5 and 8. At the start of the third turn, the cycle driver is up by two successes with the Storyteller rolling again for 9 and 0; Hiroko's player, astounded by the Storyteller's successes, rolls 1 and 7. With a total of three successes, the driver shoves Hiroko off the back of the careening cycle. Adding injury to insult, the Storyteller imposes two Bashing Health Levels of damage on Hiroko as she slams into the unforgiving concrete. Hiroko lifts her head in stunned disbelief as the hovercycle speeds away.*

Teamwork

Characters can combine successes, generally during an extended action. At the Storyteller's discretion, two or more players can roll separately and total their successes. While teamwork is effective in repairing devices, collecting information or in combat, the tag-team approach can be confusing in social situations.

For Example: *Since the enforcer in the street had no chance to catch up to Hiroko, he goes inside her flat to help his partner. The two thugs ransack the place, trying to find the holofile recordings that Hiroko took of her last conversation with Valentine Cleff. The Storyteller decides that the enforcers will need to get three successes to find Hiroko's safe since it's hidden behind a false panel. The first enforcer has a 5 Investigation and his player rolls 5, 5, 6, 9 and 0. The second thug must default to his 3 Perception, his player getting 1, 3 and 8. The enforcers discover the small plasteel safe; now all they need to do is find a way to open it.*

Second Chances

Failure is frustrating. If you're having trouble with your computer and can't figure out why, you're in for an evening of increasing frustration and decreasing productivity. ***Æon*** reflects this "frustration with failure" by allowing the Storyteller to increase the successes needed for any action that you try again after an initial failure. So if a first attempt at picking a simple manual lock fails, a character's frustration with her failure could make her try too hard the second time. To reflect this, the Storyteller asks for two successes. Of course if the character fails yet again, things will continue to escalate....

The Storyteller shouldn't invoke this rule in instances such as combat. Missing a target isn't terribly surprising under such circumstances, considering that everyone is dodging about, ducking for cover and generally not being polite enough to stand still.

Modes

There is one difference to dice actions involving psi powers. Simply put, your Dice Pool for Modes isn't based on an Attribute or Ability. Your character's permanent Psi rating determines her Dice Pool, instead. Whenever your character uses a psi power, you roll a number of dice equal to her Psi.

For Example: *Hurt by her fall, Hiroko uses the vitakinetic power Mending to heal her wounds. Hiroko's player spends a point of Psi and rolls seven dice (equal to Hiroko's Psi score). The player rolls: 1, 2, 5, 5, 9, 0 and 0. Since each success heals a Bashing Health Level, the three successes restore Hiroko to full health easily. As Hiroko picks herself up and dusts off her clothes, she decides it might be best to lay low for a while.*

Examples of Rolls

The following are a few examples of how to use these rules. Remember, each of the Abilities mentioned ties directly to a specific Attribute; unless stated otherwise, you can always default to that Attribute if you don't have the appropriate Ability. The entire list of Attributes and Abilities is detailed in **Chapter Three: Traits**, starting on page 180.

- An electrical conduit blows nearby. Roll Athletics or Martial Arts to dodge out of the way.
- Sneaking through the Orgotek warehouse, you stumble across a guard. You both roll Initiative to see who reacts first.
- The power is out and the airlock's manual release is jammed. Roll Might at +2 to difficulty to pry the doors open.
- You've been driving your hovercar across the Outback for the past 10 hours straight, hoping to reach Perth by dawn. Roll Endurance to avoid nodding off.
- Two overly curious soldiers question you about your "borrowed" officer's uniform. You could roll either Command to order them away or try Savvy to offer them a bribe.
- No matter what you do, you can't get the young girl to tell you what's wrong. Roll Rapport to get a sense of what's troubling her.
- You need to jump across the service bay to the exit while avoiding laser fire. Roll Athletics at +2 to difficulty.
- Suspicious customs officials don't like the look of the ore you've brought back from Mars. Roll Subterfuge at +1 to difficulty to assure them that it's entirely harmless and worthless.
- Your vocoder is on the fritz. Roll Linguistics at +2 to difficulty to figure out what the shopkeeper is yelling about.
- Despite your best efforts, it looks like this freebooter won't listen to reason. Roll Brawl or Martial Arts to show him the back of your hand.
- The slummers outnumber you five to one and they don't look like they're in the mood to talk. Roll Intimidation at +3 to difficulty to impress upon them that this will hurt them more than it'll hurt you.
- You burst into the cabin to discover the pilot is nowhere to be found, and the shuttle is hurtling directly toward an asteroid. Roll Pilot to steer the ship out of harm's way.
- The bioware this thug was using looks distinctly nonstandard. Roll Engineering at +1 to difficulty to determine its origin.
- A pair of American-model orbital fighters scream out from behind the moon's shadow. Roll Firearms to fire your laser cannon right back at them.
- It's your first time at this Æon Trinity office and you've forgotten your security code. Make a straight Intelligence roll to recall it.
- You could really use that fellow's platinum card. Roll Legerdemain at +1 to difficulty to lift the wallet from his breast pocket.
- What's that chiming noise? Roll Awareness to find out.

CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTER

Before you enter the **Æon** universe, you first create a character. However, the character creation process involves more than just saying, "I want to be a...." You need to know who your character is and what she has the potential to do, her likes and dislikes, her background, and more. Deciding all of this is covered step by step in this chapter, giving you the chance to create a unique psion whom you enjoy playing.

Character creation starts with a basic concept, then you assign the character's Traits to determine what she can do, and finally fill in the details on the story of her life. You should create a character who is interesting for you to play, for your friends' characters to interact with and for your Storyteller to incorporate into the story. The goal is not to make the ultimate psion, capable of destroying cities with a thought; if you easily trounce everyone you meet, your series is likely to be extremely dull. Characters with strengths and weaknesses are far more interesting, if only because the more challenging the struggle, the sweeter the victory.

Character creation is not a random process; you build your character from the ground up, to your own specifications. You assign Traits and choose everything about your character. That way you're certain to play a character whom you find entertaining.

Also consider how well your character will interact with the rest of the team. The universe is a dangerous place; a team has enough to worry about without dealing with internal strife. While the team doesn't have to be a Norça enforcement squad, members should be able to stay on the same ship without blowing it up. It also helps to figure out why the members of your team are together. Cultural, ethical or personal ties are just a few reasons why psions might work together. If your character doesn't fit in with the rest of the team, you may find yourself sitting out of a lot of the action, or splintering the group.

Role of the Storyteller

The Storyteller should guide the players through character creation. It helps move the process along with a minimum of time and fuss if the Storyteller is on hand to offer assistance.

First, pass out the character sheets and give the players a couple minutes to look them over and ask questions. Then go through the character creation process, helping the players create well-balanced characters.

Sometimes character creation can take an entire game session. This is fine; the players shouldn't feel rushed and should take the time to create believable characters. If you want to cut down on time spent, encourage your players to have their ideas ready beforehand.

Once you're done with the practical details of creating characters, you can spend the rest of the session running *Prologues*. These serve as introductory stories, allowing both you and your players to get to know the characters and the **Æon** universe.

Character Creation

All the steps of character creation are detailed here. You'll create a character in less than 30 minutes by following this process. This chapter is concerned primarily with the mechanics of allocating points for Traits and with filling in the blanks of other areas of your character.

Chapter Three: Traits, page 177, and **Chapter Four: Aptitudes**, page 194, give expanded and detailed information on each of the sections outlined below.

Step One: Concept

You begin by formulating a basic concept for your character. You don't need to know all the details of her life at this point; you just need to have a general feel for who she is. You can add specifics later on in the process; right now you're just interested in the basics.

You need to determine four things at this stage: Who you are, what powers you have, what you're like and where your loyalties lie.

Origin

Psions don't spring fully formed into the **Æon** universe. Your character had a life before she was triggered. You must decide what she did, how she lived and what was unique about her. This concept may describe her profession, her personality or her interests. The following origins are merely suggestions; if none of them fit the idea you have in mind for your character or seem too restrictive, feel free to create your own.

- **Affluent**: Connoisseur of fine things (idle rich, executive, dilettante).
- **Artist**: A creative personality (writer, dancer, actor, painter).
- **Gambler**: Life is a game (thrillseeker, irreverent, youth).
- **Hermit**: Cast adrift in the universe (vagabond, recluse, scarred veteran).
- **Nobody**: Just an average, everyday person (student, working stiff, grunt).
- **Outsider**: Fallen through society's cracks (slummer, dispossessed, neurotic).
- **Philosopher**: Yours is a world of potentials (dreamer, student, idealist).

• **Pioneer**: The universe is a wonderful mystery (researcher, trailblazer, environmentalist).

• **Protector**: One who cares for others (police, doctor, missionary, teacher).

• **Rebel**: Shaking up the status quo (criminal, gang member, politician).

• **Saint**: You follow a higher purpose (priest, visionary, theologian).

• **Scholar**: Learning is its own reward (professor, theorist, scientist).

• **Warrior**: Conflict draws you (vigilante, soldier, crusader).

***For Example**: Dee wants to create an **Æon** character. Before spending any points, she thinks about what type of character she'll play. Since she's relatively new to gaming, Dee decides this alternate self will echo her own personality in most respects. Dee sees this character being somewhat bookish and easygoing, optimistic and slightly naive at times. Then, to separate herself from her character, Dee decides that her creation grew up in a rough area and escaped it by pursuing a career in computers. She decides the Pioneer Origin best suits the idea she has in mind.*

Nature

Next you choose your character's *Nature*, a personality archetype that best suits her true personality. This self-perception guides how your character interacts with the **Æon** universe (see **Nature**, page 177, for detailed information).

***For Example**: Dee settles on Europe as her character's home and picks the name Batya Olis. Next, Dee looks at the Natures so that she may determine Batya's fundamental mindset. This takes some thought. Batya could be an Analyst, considering her curious and scientific personality; however, Dee finds that too...analytical. Visionary sounds interesting, but Dee can't think of what Batya might be searching for. Dee finally decides that Explorer suits Batya's inquisitive temperament.*

Aptitude

A pivotal aspect of any **Æon** character is her *Aptitude*, her psionic capability. Noetic scientists don't yet understand why an individual has a given potential or why the Prometheus Effect imprints only a specific Aptitude. You may choose any one of the six Aptitudes that the orders currently teach (see **Chapter Four: Aptitudes**, page 194, for specifics). An Aptitude is the "branch" of psionics that your character has developed; it doesn't dictate loyalty to an order (Allegiance covers that).

Allegiance

Most psions maintain loyalty to the orders that trained them in their Aptitudes. Yet, after learning how to control their powers, a few Gifted join different orders. Some have even been known to leave the orders

entirely for a corporation, nation, society — or even their own causes. You must determine where your character's ideals and loyalties lie. Keep in mind that there's a lot of friction between some orders, restricting the type of psion that certain orders will allow to join them, no matter what her personal outlook. See **Allegiance**, page 179, for descriptions of the orders' general philosophies.

Although most psions have an Allegiance to a specific order (or to the Æon Trinity), you shouldn't feel restricted by this. Depending on your character's concept, she may have an Allegiance to a specific government, corporation, religion, criminal organization — or she may deny any ties and try going it alone.

Allegiance determines the basic training that your psion receives. The Ability groups for each Allegiance are listed under **Step Three: Choosing Abilities**, below.

For Example: *Since Dee wants Batya to be skilled with computers, Dee reasons that her character was discovered through one of Orgotek's aptitude tests. Dee likes the roleplaying potential of Electrokinesis and picks that as Batya's Aptitude. However, Orgotek is too corporate for her tastes. Dee decides that Batya's talent came to the attention of the Æon Trinity, which offered her a position in its Triton Division. Æon Trinity is noted as Batya's Allegiance.*

Step Two: Choosing Attributes

Attributes are innate potentials represented by numerical ratings. These Traits are the basis for all of your character's capabilities. Each character's Attributes are rated on a scale of one to five and are represented by dots: • is abysmal, •• is average, and ••••• is incredible. Psions start with a rating of one dot in each of the nine Attributes, which may then be improved upon by spending Attribute points on a one-for-one basis.

Attributes are divided into three areas: *Physical*, *Mental* and *Social* (see **Attributes**, page 180, for detailed information). You must prioritize these three Attribute categories, determining one area in which your character is particularly adept (primary), one in which she's fairly average (secondary), and one in which she's weak (tertiary). You spend *seven* Attribute points in your primary area, *five* Attribute points in your secondary area and *three* Attribute points in your tertiary area. Allocate the points within each group however you see fit (from putting the majority of points in one Attribute to spreading them out evenly). If an Attribute ends up lower than you'd like, don't worry. You may improve it later with bonus points or experience.

Any element of your character's concept may suggest the placement of Attribute points. A highly developed clairsentient might have strong Mental Attributes, while a character used to relying on his wits might have high Social Attributes.

If any of your character's Attributes are rated at four dots or higher, you need to choose a Quality for it. See **Qualities**, page 180, for specifics.

For Example: *Dee determines Batya's Attribute categories as follows:*

Mental is primary. The character is curious and perceptive, wondering what makes things tick in machines, people and everything around her. Batya's escape into intellectual pursuits made her childhood bearable (she was raised in a Polish family that scraped by through various menial jobs in the Warsaw metroplex).

Dee splits the seven points available to the primary Attribute group as follows: three in Perception, three in Intelligence and one in Wits. These points are added to the one free point that psions receive for each Attribute, putting Batya at 4 Perception, 4 Intelligence and 2 Wits. Batya is a very shrewd observer and has an impressive reasoning facility; however, she sometimes lets her eagerness overwhelm her common sense in her pursuit of knowledge. Since Batya has two Attributes of four, Dee must choose a Quality for each. She picks Attentive for Batya's Perception, and Bright for her Intelligence.

Dee makes Social her secondary Attribute category. A pleasant, amiable person, Batya enjoys being around others. Although labeled "slummers" like other low-class families, Batya's parents were always supportive and encouraged her to think positively. This enthusiasm is Batya's best defense against adversity.

Of the five points available to secondary Attributes, Dee allocates two to Appearance, one to Manipulation and the last two to Charisma, giving Batya a 3 Appearance, 2 Manipulation and 3 Charisma. Batya is a pretty, outgoing woman, but she doesn't usually apply her charm to exploit others.

Dee makes Physical Attributes the remaining, tertiary category. Batya's mental studies didn't leave her much time to work on her physical abilities. She's healthy, but Batya's no Olympic hopeful.

With only three points to spend, Dee weighs her options. She spends two points on Dexterity and one on Stamina, so Batya has a 1 Strength, 3 Dexterity and 2 Stamina. Dee doesn't envision Batya to be particularly strong, but does consider her nimble.

Step Three: Choosing Abilities

As Attributes are your character's innate qualities, *Abilities* are the skills and talents that she has developed in her life (see **Abilities**, page 182, for specifics). Abilities are rated from • (basic) to ••••• (superior). Abilities begin with a rating of zero, not 1 as Attributes do. You have 10 Ability points to spend on your Ability Group (listed below), and another 13 points to spend on other Abilities as you choose. You may distribute Ability points on a one-for-one basis however you see fit, although individual Ability ratings cannot be higher than three at character creation. Bonus points may be spent here, as they can be with Attributes.

Concept is important to deciding where to assign Ability points. A bookish technician won't be very skilled in com-

Option: Pooling Attribute Points and Ability Points

Instead of splitting your Attribute points between primary, secondary and tertiary groups, you may spend the total 15 Attribute points any way you see fit. The only limitation is that you can put no more than eight and no less than two points in any one Attribute group.

Similarly, instead of taking an Ability group, you can take the total 23 Ability points and distribute them among your Abilities any way you like. As before, individual Ability ratings may not begin higher than three at character creation.

bat, while a foot soldier won't know much about piloting deep-space craft. You may choose an area of specialization within an Ability; see **Specialties**, page 182, for more information.

Ability Groups

These are Ability clusters in which groups focus their training; a character's Ability group is based on her Allegiance. You need not put points in every Ability listed in your group, but you can put no more than three in any one Ability.

While only the orders and the Trinity are listed here, Ability groups are available for whatever Allegiance you choose. The Storyteller selects six Abilities that he feels best represent your particular Allegiance.

- **Æsculapians:** Academics, Awareness, Medicine, Meditation, Resistance, Science
- **ISRA:** Athletics, Awareness, Investigation, Meditation, Pilot, Rapport
- **The Legions:** Athletics, Brawl or Martial Arts, Command, Firearms, Melee, Survival
- **The Ministry:** Bureaucracy, Command, Etiquette, Interrogation, Martial Arts, Rapport
- **Norça:** Athletics, Brawl or Martial Arts, Intrusion, Melee, Stealth, Savvy
- **Orgotek:** Academics, Bureaucracy, Firearms, Science, Subterfuge, Engineering
- **Æon Trinity:** Academics, Investigation, Firearms, Resistance, Subterfuge, one close combat Ability (Brawl, Martial Arts or Melee)

Skill Totals

As Attributes are raw capabilities and Abilities are learned talents, the two combine to form your character's *Skill Totals*. To calculate a Skill Total, take the base Attribute, add the relevant Ability and write the total after the Ability rating on your character sheet (in the box after the row of five dots). Whenever you make a roll, your Dice Pool equals the Skill Total in that box.

For Example: *Dee has 10 Ability points to spend based on Batya's Æon Trinity Allegiance. Dee puts three points in Academics, two in Investigation, one in Firearms and two in Subterfuge, and picks the Martial Arts Ability for two points.*

Dee spends her remaining 13 Ability points after some thought. She puts one point in each of Athletics, Medicine, Rapport and Style. Two points go to each of Awareness, Intrusion and Science. Since Batya is supposed to be a whiz with computers, Dee allocates three points to Engineering. She wants to give Batya the Computers Specialty, but that will have to wait for bonus points.

Step Four: Advantages

Advantages are unique resources (*Backgrounds*) and special capabilities (*Aptitudes*). You have a specific number of points to spend on a one-for-one basis in each advantage category. Advantages are rated • (minor) to ••••• (advanced). You may spend bonus points here as you can with Attributes and Abilities.

Backgrounds

Backgrounds measure your "place" in the **Æon** universe. They're a measure of who you know, who knows you and what resources you can draw upon. You have *seven* points to allocate among your character's Backgrounds. Your choices should reflect your character concept (see **Backgrounds**, page 186, for details).

For Example: *While Dee has a good idea of where Batya came from and what she knows, Dee isn't certain what her character's Backgrounds might be. Things fall into place with a little thought.*

Dee puts two points in Allies, one for each of Batya's parents. Dee thinks Batya used her ties to Orgotek and the Æon Trinity to get her folks better jobs. She suggests the idea to the Storyteller, who likes the concept; Batya's father becomes a mid-level security guard, and her mother becomes an assistant medical technician in the Warsaw metroplex. Dee then puts a point in Cipher, deciding that Batya used her computer skills to cover her past. Following that train of thought, Dee assigns a point to Contacts, which represents that Batya has established a tenuous relationship with users in the murky OpNet. Since Batya was able to raise herself from her destitute beginnings, Dee allocates two points to Resources. Finally, Dee puts a point in Status, thinking that Batya is a low-ranking but noted member of the Æon Trinity.

Aptitudes

Having chosen your character's Aptitude already, you distribute points among its special powers, called *Modes*. Each Aptitude has three Modes; you have only *three* points to spend among Modes. This isn't a lot to allocate to a central aspect of your character, so be careful when selecting powers (see **Chapter Four: Aptitudes**, page 194, for choices). Bonus points can buy more powers in your Aptitude, but starting characters cannot have more than three dots in a Mode.

Bonus points can also buy one dot in an *auxiliary*

Mode, a power outside of your character's Aptitude that manifested during the transformation into a psion. Humans can't yet exhibit multiple Aptitudes, even by undergoing the Prometheus Effect. However, auxiliary Modes are vestigial signs of this potential. While you may buy more than one auxiliary Mode, they may never be rated higher than one dot.

For Example: *Dee considers long and hard how to spend the three points on Batya's Electrokinesis Modes. She finally decides that Batya has developed her control of hardtech devices relatively well, but is also working on manipulating organics. Dee puts two points in Technokinesis and a point in Electromanipulation.*

Step Five: Finishing Touches

All that's left to do is to fill out or develop the last elements of the character. These final details are as important as any other element of bringing your character to life.

Willpower

Willpower measures the power of convictions and self-control. The circles on your character sheet reflect your character's maximum or *permanent* Willpower rating (also called the *score*), which is the theoretical limit of determination. The squares track your character's momentary force of will; this *current* rating (also referred to as *points*) drops as will is exerted (by spending Willpower points), and grows as your character reinforces belief in herself (by acting true to her nature) — see **Willpower**, page 190, for further details.

Permanent Willpower begins at *five* dots, and bonus points may be spent to raise it (to a maximum of 10). Current Willpower starts equal to your character's permanent score.

Psi

The subquantum universe is the fifth force of nature, discovered by humanity only with the emergence of psionic powers. Psi energy permeates all things and beings and thus unites all powers and forces in the universe. *Psi* rates your character's psionic capacity and attunement to the energy of all things. *Permanent* Psi, listed as circles on the character sheet, measures your character's overall psionic strength. This is not only the ability to manipulate psionic energy, but an indication of the amount of biotech that may be handled safely. The *current* rating, listed as squares, describes reserves of psionic energy and is used to power Modes (refer to **Psi**, page 191, for more specifics).

To determine Psi score, add your character's Stamina, Wits and Charisma, and divide the total by two (round fractions up). The result is your character's starting rating, although you may use bonus points to increase it (to a maximum of 10). Current Psi starts equal to the permanent rating.

Initiative

Initiative is used whenever there is a question as to which character performs an action before another character. Initiative is the total of your character's Dexterity plus Wits. As with other advantages, you may raise this score with bonus points.

Movement

Movement indicates the distance your character may travel in one action. Although not entirely realistic, for simplicity's sake all characters have the same base movement; Dexterity varies running distance, however. Your character may *walk* five meters, *run* her Dexterity rating +12 meters, and *sprint* (Dexterity x 3) +20 meters.

Bonus Points

Bonus points are used to fill in the blanks left on the character sheet during basic character creation. You have 15 bonus points, and may spend them on any Attributes, Abilities or Advantages. However, Trait costs vary (see the **Character Creation Table**, below); also, Abilities and Modes cannot be raised above 3 during character creation.

***For Example**: The end in sight, Dee quickly notes that Batya's Willpower score starts at 5. Batya's Psi score is 4 and her Initiative is 5.*

Dee spends 10 bonus points, raising Batya's Psi score to 6. Another four increase Technokinesis to 3. Dee puts her final point in Engineering to give Batya the Computers Specialty.

Character Creation Table

This covers the character creation process in short form; refer to the appropriate sections for details. Available points are listed where relevant.

- **Step One: Concept**
  Choose Origin, Aptitude (page 194), Nature (page 177) and Allegiance (page 179)
- **Step Two: Select Attributes (page 180)**
  Prioritize the three areas: Physical, Mental and Social
  Choose primary Attributes (7 points)
  Choose secondary Attributes (5 points)
  Choose tertiary Attributes (3 points)
- **Step Three: Select Abilities (page 182)**
  Choose Ability Group (based on Allegiance) (10 points)
  Choose other desired Abilities (13 points)
  Calculate Skill Totals
- **Step Four: Select Advantages**
  Choose Backgrounds (page 186) (7 points)
  Choose Modes (based on Aptitude, page 194) (3 points)
- **Step Five: Finishing Touches**
  Record initial Willpower (5), Psi ([Stamina + Wits + Charisma] ÷ 2, rounded up), Initiative (Dexterity + Wits), Movement (walk 5 m, run Dex +12 m, sprint [Dex x 3] +20 m)
  Spend Bonus points (15 points)

Bonus Points

Trait	Cost per dot
Attributes	5
Abilities	2
Specialties (max. three per Ability)	1
Backgrounds	1
Aptitude Modes	4
Auxiliary Modes (max. one dot)	6
Willpower	2
Psi	5
Initiative	1

Spark of Life

Now that you have the dots and Traits out of the way, you can personalize your creation and make her uniquely yours. The more details you work out, the more depth your character has. While they have no direct rules impact, these details make it easier for both you and your Storyteller to know who your character is and how she fits into the series.

- **How old are you?** Noetic scientists have found little corollary between age and psionic power. While most psions in the field are between 16 and 60, others range in age from adolescents to octogenarians. Also think about what events took place during your character's life. Experiences have as much impact on how old you feel as your physical age does.
- **What do you look like?** While the Appearance Trait indicates how attractive you are, it doesn't say what it is that makes you attractive, nor anything else about your physical identity. Consider your other Traits, including Nature and Backgrounds. Also remember that you can be from any culture, or of any religion, race or sexual orientation.
- **Did you ever notice you were...different?** The Prometheus Effect merely enhances a previously existing psionic potential. Many latents experience flashes

of power, whether they realize it or not. You may have already been aware of your potential before being contacted by a search team, or you may have been baffled and confused by the inexplicable occurrences that happened around you. Perhaps you have lived blissfully unaware of your nature.

• **How were you discovered?** Each order has its own method of finding recruits. Were you approached out of the blue, abducted, raised from birth, stumbled across, or did you track down psions yourself? Did the Æon Trinity or some other organization discover you and bring you to an order?

• **What are your quirks?** Everyone has interesting personal details; what are yours? They can be anything, from always wearing an old flight suit to having a morbid sense of humor. Good quirks help define your personality and also give the Storyteller more to work with for character interactions and story hooks.

• **Who is important in your life?** How do you feel about your family (or do you even have one)? Are your friends close or merely casual acquaintances? Do you even keep in touch with your loved ones now that you're one of the Gifted? Just because you've become a psion doesn't mean you lose your previous ties — although it may certainly change how people feel toward you, and vice versa.

• **What do you own?** This is usually an afterthought, but a little attention to this question is useful. Mundane things like an apartment or clothes are considered to be covered by Resources. However, you need to buy the weapon, computer, exploration craft or medical gear that you want. Generally, Resource rolls are used for such items — although the Storyteller might make finding that gun, computer or ship your initial story....

• **How do you perceive the universe around you?** Your character's Psi score has some influence in this, but doesn't control her viewpoint. Are you a xenophile? Does space and all that it contains fascinate you? Do you envy other psions? Do you yearn for your old life? Are you intrigued by Aberrants? Your feelings about other psions, blanks, aliens and even Aberrants color your interactions with them.

• **How did you meet the rest of your team?** The "team" refers to the other players' characters. While the team itself can take many forms, you still need to figure out how you all came together. Whether it's a willing alliance or a marriage of convenience, be sure that there is some level of trust between yourself and the others.

• **What are your motivations?** No one lives without some sort of motivation. What are your goals? What do you fear? What gives you strength? Also ask yourself "why?" regarding these questions. Motivations can be vague (a thirst for knowledge) or very specific (you vowed vengeance on the Fourth Legion for failing to save your family). You understand who you are in fleshing out your ambitions and priorities.

Who Needs Psi Powers? Or, Playing a "Normal" Human

While psions are central to the events that shape the 22nd century, you're not obligated to write one up. Being a psion gives your character quite an edge over the "blanks," but some people thrive on challenges. There are eight billion humans running around in 2120; you're certainly welcome to play one of them.

Bear in mind that writing up a "neut" does call for some modifications to the creation system detailed above. The following information outlines these changes.

Step One: Concept — As always, your concept is key to creating an interesting, three-dimensional character. You don't have to worry about that whole psi power angle, so disregard the "Aptitude" option. Since many normal humans work for the orders, you can even choose one as an Allegiance if you wish.

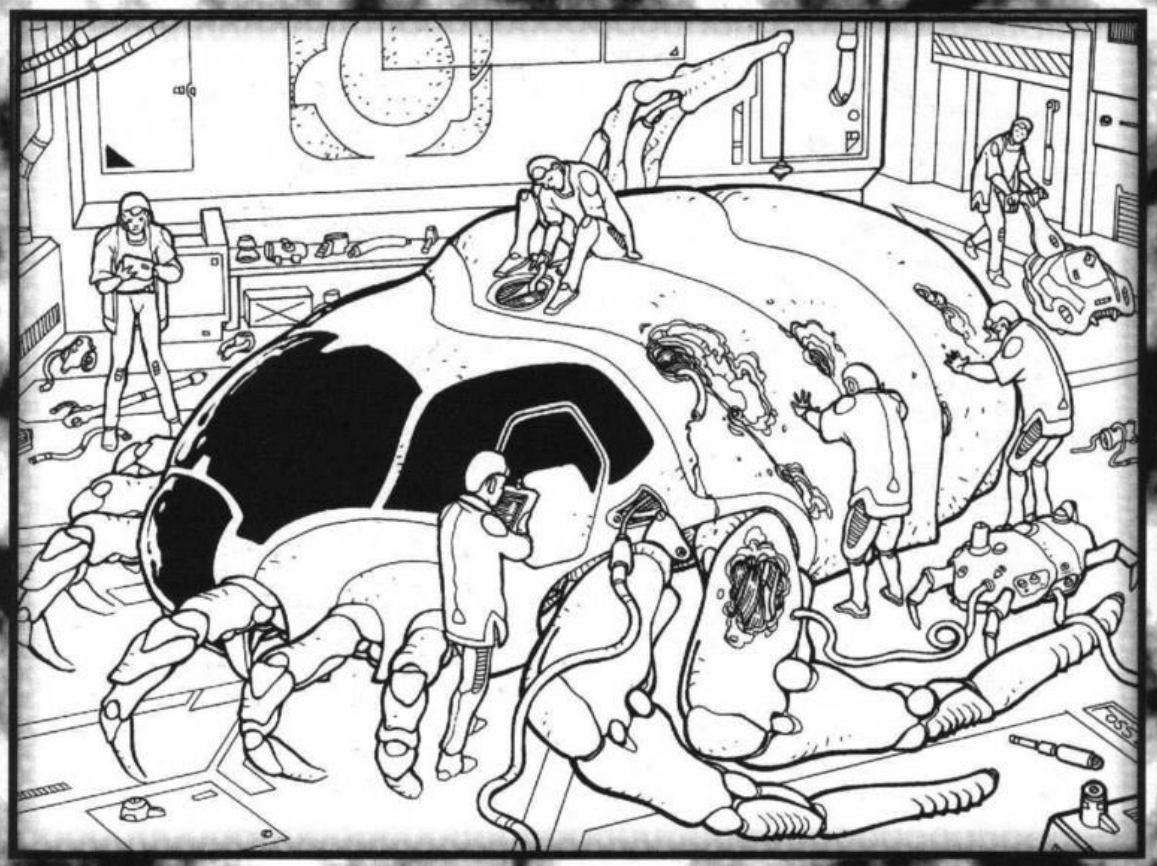
Step Two: Choosing Attributes — While you still prioritize your Attributes, your character doesn't get quite as many points to play with since she didn't undergo the Prometheus Effect. You get six dots to divide among the primary Attributes, four for secondary Attributes and three for tertiary ones.

Step Three: Choosing Abilities — You get the same number of points to spend on Abilities as you would for a psion: 10 for Allegiance if you choose one, and another 13 for any other Abilities. If you don't choose an Allegiance, you get a total of 23 points to spend on Abilities.

Step Four: Advantages — You have only six points to spend on Backgrounds, and your character's Backgrounds cannot be specifically psion-related. (If you want a psion mentor, you'd better have a good reason or the Storyteller's going to vote it down.) Furthermore, you start with 3 Willpower and 1 Psi. (All living things have at least 1 Psi; the point represents the psionic energy that pervades all things. No, you don't get any points to spend on an Aptitude.)

Other Stuff — To help compensate for the disparities between neutrals and the Gifted, normal humans get 21 bonus points instead of a psion's 15. These may be spent on anything except psi powers. The Storyteller may impose further restrictions depending on the story he's running, or he may decide to create special details that help your human character compensate (it's his call).

The Storyteller may wish to have players write up their non-psion characters in this fashion even if they're going to become psions at a later date. This way, such characters are introduced and played as normal humans until being triggered, whereupon they become psions and their character sheets are updated accordingly. This gives players a chance to *really* get into their characters before they're enhanced, making the transition even more dramatic.



***For Example**: Dee wants to establish some more details about how Batya became a psion, what caused the Æon Trinity to notice her and what she's been doing for the organization since. The Storyteller asks her to keep all this vague for the time being, since he recognizes these details as the perfect focus for Batya's Prologue.*

Dee shrugs and decides to take care of some other details. She notes Batya's physical appearance on the back of the character sheet. She sees Batya as a slight, young woman with short chestnut hair, a broad pretty face and hazel eyes. Dee thinks Batya is proud of her figure and wears inexpensive but stylish Brazilian clothes that complement her shape.

Batya's personality is already well-detailed, but Dee thinks a few quirks would be evocative. She decides that Batya always tinkers with her computer, modifying various systems and even adjusting her agent. Dee thinks an entertaining roleplaying hook would be to combine Batya's Explorer Nature and average Wits. Dee decides that Batya's curiosity often gets the better of her common sense, resulting in some inappropriate comments and questions when Batya speaks before she thinks.

Batya's Resources afford her a comfortable apartment, and even a vehicle, but Dee waits to find out more about where the series is set before she nails these things down. Similarly, she decides to hold off on most equipment for now (except for Batya's computer, which Dee decides is a top-of-the-line Wazukana). Dee is now ready to introduce Batya to the series, through the Prologue that the Storyteller will run for her.

The Team

Operating alone in the dangerous universe of the 22nd century isn't a good idea. Psions routinely band together in teams due to their challenging pursuits. These teams vary wildly in number of members, representation and organization, but they all share one thing in common: a dedication to the team and to the individuals who comprise it.

Whether you're creeping down a corridor checking for Aberrant infestations or arguing the regulations involved in "requisitioning" prototype Legion bioware, you need to know that your team supports you. Much like a family, the team may not always get along — individuals could even have distinctly opposing philosophies — but there remains a foundation of respect and reliance on one another that can weather almost any storm.

Creating a Team

The type of team the characters comprise has a tremendous bearing on what the series will be like. If the Storyteller plans to run a series steeped in intrigue and inter-order politics, he should make sure the players know

this before they create a group of combat-hungry Legionnaires. In the end, the story revolves around the team (and, therefore, the characters); understanding what the team is about helps both players and Storyteller to immerse themselves in the **Æon** cosmos.

The following are a few questions that should be considered about the team during character creation, and (hopefully) answered by the end of the Prologue.

- **Where is the team based?** This depends on where the Storyteller sets his series. Knowing that the team operates out of Orgotek regional offices, a Legion post, a patrol craft or simply meets at someone's flat gives a good basis for both Storyteller and players.
- **How do the team members interact?** A team's internal dynamics can give everyone a wealth of roleplaying opportunities and story hooks. Are the members all close friends? Is the team a business venture? Are there any jealousies or rivalries among members? Are there any secrets kept from certain members? What's the level of trust and camaraderie?
- **What are the team's missions?** This ties closely with the type of series the Storyteller runs. The team may have a specific charter given to it by superiors (patrol the Belt for signs of Aberrant incursion, act as emissaries to the new Qin embassy on Mars), or it may have its own agenda (make life rough on Orgotek, help the elgees). The team's focus may be on combat or intrigue, and the Storyteller should be sure that missions are geared accordingly. However, it always helps to mix things up a bit (having a rough-and-tumble Legion squad escort a high-ranking UAN official to an international symposium can make for some interesting roleplaying).
- **Is there a team leader?** Decisions must be made somehow. Does your team go by military rank or corporate structure? Is it a democratic group? Are the members well-disciplined and respectful of others' suggestions, or do they tend toward petty squabbling?
- **What is the team's allegiance?** Just as individuals choose Allegiance, so too might a team. A group with the support of an order or government can draw upon this resource for finances, gear and backup — although usually at the cost of restrictions on the members' freedoms and responsibilities. A team that goes it alone can call its own shots, but operates without a safety net.
- **Who are the team's enemies?** The team might have consciously chosen to defy a specific group. Is that organization aware of the team's defiance (and does it care)? Are there other agencies operating contrary to the team's goals? Is the team aware of these forces? What do these enemies intend?
- **Why does the team exist?** This is perhaps the most important question of all. There's a reason why the characters got together and remain together. Did they have a friend in common? Were they assigned by the Trinity or some other group? Were they drawn together by similar goals or philosophies, or is it simply a marriage of convenience?

Prologue

The *Prologue* is your character's introduction to the story. It combines back history, personal details and transformation into a psion. The Prologue is usually a short, one-on-one roleplaying session between player and Storyteller, and introduces you and your character to the **Æon** universe.

Most good roleplayers begin with ideas for the characters they want to play, customize those ideas during creation, get a real feel for those personalities from Prologues, and emerge from interactions with the Storyteller and other players' characters with full-blown characters. These first roleplaying opportunities are critical to character development, providing you with the chance to get inside your character's head and react to things as she would. This is a crucial time for setting up relationships with people, places and things that will become important to your character in the future, making it easier and more natural for your Storyteller to work those factors into the series. It's also important to depict your character's Backgrounds during the Prologue. Using roleplaying to introduce the psion's allies or patrons, to relate how she reached her current status, to describe her wealth — all of these things enhance your character's depth.

Storyteller: Areas of Focus

Although the Prometheus Effect leaves a person forever altered, opening new vistas of perception and possibility, it does not change who she was. To better understand the character's existence as a psion, the player must know what the character was like before she was triggered. Briefly roleplaying her life up to that point, and highlighting "defining moments" and important people are excellent ways to establish the character and to be entertained at the same time.

Similarly, describing the Prometheus Effect itself as it happens is much more dramatic than saying, "Okay, you get lit up. Now you're a psion." Even the proxies don't fully understand the process; using that mystique underlines the changes that happen to the character.

Following up triggering with a sketch of initial training in the psi order serves a number of functions, depending on the Prologue's direction. It can range from simply bringing the characters together to causing each to question what he knows about Aberrants, aliens or even the orders themselves. Whatever the specific focus of a Prologue, the key is to give the players a taste of the universe. This makes each character and the setting all the more real and dynamic in subsequent sessions.

Each character's Prologue should ultimately set the scene for the team as a whole. This introduction could cover the characters' joining, or could set things in motion to bring them together in the first episode. Whatever the case, the Storyteller should ensure that individual Prologues reinforce, however subtly, the goals to which the team will dedicate itself.

Fine Tuning

The Prologue lets you test your character, making sure she can do the things you want her to. It's not unusual to discover that an Ability functions differently than you thought, or that a higher (or lower!) Trait makes more sense for your character. After the Prologue, you may modify your character (with the Storyteller's supervision), adjusting her to better fit your concept and the series. You don't get any more development points, but you may shift existing points around as appropriate. Once you begin the regular series, any further modifications must be made with experience points.

Character Development

Your character learns many things about herself, her abilities and her areas for improvement during a story. Success and failure combine to teach you about your character's limitations and potential. Your character will make mistakes, gain insight, practice and hopefully not repeat past errors. All of these things are measured in a game through *experience points*.

Experience

The Storyteller has the responsibility of quantifying each character's experiences. While the knowledge *you* gain concerning plotlines, supporting characters and your team cannot be measured, *your character's* experience can. Experience points are an artificial measure of success or accomplishment that translate into enhanced power and capability. The dramatic situations in which **Æon** characters often find themselves promote fast learning as a means of survival.

Awarding Experience Points

The Storyteller should award experience points at the end of every story. All characters typically get the same number, although particularly outstanding accomplishments or roleplaying can earn an individual bonus experience. The amount of experience points given depends on a number of factors.

Keep in mind that a story might continue for more than one game session, although withholding experience points for too long can frustrate players. Generally, if the Storyteller sees a particular story arc continuing for more than three sessions, he should give experience about halfway (or even a third of the way) through.

The categories below describe areas in which characters can win experience. Each category is worth one experience point. No character should ever fulfill every single category at one time, although multiple characters may qualify for the same award.

- **Automatic** — Each character receives one point at the end of every story.
- **Discovery** — The character understands something new and significant about herself, her fellow psions or the universe.
- **Exceptional Roleplay** — The player roleplayed her character particularly well. This behavior should be appropriate to the character; points should not be awarded for outlandish, out-of-character antics.
- **Heroism** — The character risked life and limb to save the day. Only the most dramatic situations qualify for this award — stupidity does not count.
- **Wisdom** — The character discovered a way out of a trap or learned the truth behind a mystery. The group often deduces solutions together, in which case everyone should be awarded. However, if one character pieces everything together by herself, only she gets the award.
- **Creativity** — This point is reserved for players who add to the story's enjoyment, but who don't distract from the game. This includes, but is not limited to, well-developed backgrounds, character journals or introducing new story elements. This bonus is highly discretionary and should be awarded infrequently.
- **Cohesion** — The characters worked exceptionally well together, defeating their opponents or strategically investigating all avenues of information.

Experience Costs

Once experience is doled out, players can spend it in any of the following areas. Costs vary depending on the Trait involved. Also, increasing Traits or buying new ones must be roleplayed before spending any points (it's the roleplaying that's important).

Trait Increase	Cost
Attribute	current rating x 6
Ability	current rating x 4
Background	current rating x 3
Aptitude Mode	current rating x 5
Willpower	current rating x 3
Psi	current rating x 6
Initiative	current rating

New Trait	Cost
Ability	4
Specialty (max. three per Ability)	current rating
Background	3
Aptitude Mode	7
Auxiliary Mode (max. one dot)	10

Roleplaying Development

Skill doesn't develop spontaneously. The dots on your character sheet are easy to fill in, but actually improving such capabilities in real life takes time, practice and application. **Æon** characters, like real people, can only improve Traits that they exercise. There are three key ways to justify increasing your character's capabilities: application, research and training. You can only spend experience points on a particular Trait if your character has used that skill, performed thorough research or received additional training.

It is vital, whatever method of development that you follow, that the growth be roleplayed. Whether that means seeking out your mentor for formalized training or swapping tips of the trade with others, development must be part of the story. Taking an entire game session to roll dice and increase your Brawl Ability isn't the point. The Storyteller and player should agree upon the circumstances and time necessary to improve a Trait. Skill improvement need not be the focus of the story, but should derive logically from the plot.

Application

Using a Trait repeatedly is the primary way to exercise it. Abilities that you use regularly are perfect to spend experience on. Such "training in the field" is suitable for virtually all Traits.

Even if you fail in a task, related Traits still qualify as practiced or applied. Sometimes we learn more from our mistakes than from our successes. The Storyteller should allow you to spend experience on Traits used ineffectively as well as on those used effectively.

Research

Research is useful for improving knowledge-related Traits. Simple study, however, does not complete the process. Real-world application cements such information, giving your character a solid foundation of knowledge and practical experience.

You can increase knowledge-related Traits at low levels with in-depth research. At higher ratings, however, you must combine study with application.

Research material for raising Traits can be found almost anywhere. Digital libraries, educational programming, printed books or even scientific experimentation can increase your character's knowledge base. New material appropriate to a Trait must be studied each time if you wish to increase that Trait.

Training

If your character isn't exposed to situations in which her Abilities improve naturally, she can seek training. Formalized training focuses on improving a certain Trait through rigorous repetition in a controlled environment. Any Trait can be improved through training, although some skills develop better through "real-world" application.

Your character can seek training from numerous sources. Gyms promote physical fitness, schools educate and various programs are designed to improve social skills. Attending most of these training institutions costs money and time. The Storyteller should attach an appropriate price tag and training time, in addition to the experience point cost.

Finding and indulging in training is more than a way to improve Traits. A resourceful Storyteller can tie training sessions into the series, plumbing new depths in your character's identity and in the story.

Increasing Attributes

Each of the Attribute groups demands a different focus for improvement. Physical Attributes can be im-

Development and Backgrounds

Certain backgrounds can reduce the costs of improving a Trait. Most notably, the Mentor Background provides you with direct access to training or research materials. Although the Mentor acts as an advisor and confidant, he also can provide your character with the means to improve herself. The Storyteller should decide what Abilities your patron might have (determined by the Background's rating and the Mentor's nature). Mentors aren't automatons that simply improve your character's capability with a snap of their fingers. Your character still has to work at the Trait and may even owe her Mentor a favor or two.

Contacts, Allies and even Followers may possess superior skill in certain areas. These may prove more difficult to tap for education and training than going to a Mentor, but are still excellent resources. Contacts usually charge fees (favors, money, information) and certainly aren't as helpful as a real teacher; however, your character may have access to a wide range of training through contacts. Allies are often very helpful and can likewise present a wide array of abilities; still, social or family obligations between you and your Allies can interfere with training. Followers may feel obligated to teach you, although they may resent the new responsibility depending on the nature of the bond.

Overall, your character's backgrounds provide a vast range of potential educational opportunities. The ease of drawing upon these resources depends on the nature of the relationship, the background character's capability and your character's own initiative.

proved through rigorous training or exercise. Combat experience, manual labor or athletic pursuits can all improve your character's physical prowess. Mental Attributes develop mostly through discipline and constant exposure to new material. A stagnant mind never improves, while an active one can overcome any limitation. The major component of improving Social Attributes is human interaction. Practice and some training with others can help mold social skills.

Changing a basic Attribute is the most difficult aspect of character development. Your character's vision cannot suddenly double in clarity nor can she suddenly double her intelligence after reading a couple of books. To simulate this, Attributes are one of the highest-cost items on the experience chart. Still, note that an appropriate Attribute raised with experience points improves your character's overall rating in Initiative, Movement and in her Skill Totals as well. She must increase her Psi score separately, however.

Increasing Abilities

Æon characters possess a wide range of Abilities, which improve easily with the proper focus. Any Ability can be increased with the proper training. While such improvement is rapid at low levels, the cost increases dramatically as your character's expertise grows. Only the most dedicated individuals can master their fields.

An Ability in which your character has a Specialty increases just like any other. When the specialized Ability raises to the next dot, your character's Specialty goes up automatically as well, remaining one dot higher than the Ability itself. This increase works the same for all of the Specialties that your character has in that Ability (remember that your character is limited to a maximum of three Specialties in each Ability).

Say your character currently has two dots in Firearms, and you had previously purchased the Targeting Specialty (giving your character an extra die when aiming). Raising the Firearms Ability to three dots costs eight experience points, and you still keep the extra die for targeting (giving your character a 4 Firearms rating when aiming).

If you bought the Zero-g Specialty before you raised the Firearms rating, it would have cost four experience. It would still cost eight experience points to go to 3 Firearms, but both Targeting and Zero-g Specialties would still increase (giving your character a 4 Firearms rating when targeting or when firing in microgravity).

Increasing Modes

Aptitude Modes require special training to improve. These powerful psi effects don't simply spring into being in an individual. Each order has training facilities established to further its psions' development. Training methods differ among the orders,

from the Ministry's rigorous scrutiny and evaluation to ISRA's informal meditation. You may increase your character's Mode ratings as long as training needs are addressed appropriately in the series, through roleplay.

Increasing Backgrounds

Backgrounds can be improved only through actual roleplay. New Contacts cannot be studied, nor can you practice increasing your number of close Allies or your Mentor's power and influence. Backgrounds develop strictly over the course of a story. The Storyteller can introduce a new Contact, but if you botch the connection the contact might never call back. Likewise, your character may actively seek to gain more Influence by manipulating politicians and local authorities. Backgrounds developed through roleplay then cost experience points to raise. Gaining temporary citizenship in a country may constitute only a travel visa. To make the new rating an intrinsic part of your character, a key element of her ongoing story, you must spend the appropriate experience.

New Backgrounds develop in much the same way. They're introduced into the story by you or the Storyteller. They are then made permanent by spending experience points.

This doesn't mean your character can have friends, resources or gear only if she buys them as Backgrounds. If she stumbles across a case full of money or lucks onto an armored jumpsuit, you needn't spend experience to keep it.

Backgrounds represent special relationships (whether with another person or even a ship) that you feel create an important dynamic for your character. Friends, money, connections and the like that aren't purchased as Backgrounds still exist, but they don't have the same strong ties to your character as those bought as Backgrounds do. You need to spend experience only on the Backgrounds that you want to be a central part of the story, a sort of "supporting cast" of your very own. Backgrounds give your character special benefits and shouldn't be treated frivolously (by either player or Storyteller).

Losing Traits

Generally, Attributes, Abilities and Modes can be reduced only due to extreme injury, loss of a limb or a similar condition. If your character suffers an injury sufficient to impair her, the Storyteller must decide what impact the accident has on her Traits. Your character's Traits should be reduced only in the most extreme cases.

Backgrounds, unlike most Traits, can actually lower in rating over time. Contacts, Mentors and Allies may cease assisting you (whether due to poor treatment by your character, disappearing or even dying). Devices can break down. Countries can deport your character for breaking the law. Backgrounds should only be reduced if you abuse them (assaulting Allies, squandering Resources) or if the reduction furthers the plot — in which case the Storyteller should restore or replace the Background at a later date.

The Storyteller should make sure any changes to a character's Backgrounds are justified through the character's own actions or that they contribute productively and significantly to the story. Followers don't exist for the Storyteller to snuff; they're just as much a part of the character as her Attributes and Abilities, and should be given the same consideration.

Personality Development

Your character's personality can change radically over time. Innocent youths can become hardened veterans and cynics can learn to believe in truly good causes. These changes cannot be mapped on a character sheet. They develop through roleplaying and interaction with other characters. Certain Traits, however, define your character's personality. Nature describes true personality, Allegiance reflects loyalties, Willpower rates strength of will and Psi assesses attunement to the energy that binds all things.

Changing Nature

Nature defines a personality's overriding focus. The forces that shape a child into an adult mold the basic fabric of her personality. These influences (parents, siblings, friends, enemies) cannot be denied. Even if you reject the tenets these influences uphold, they still alter your perception and compel you to accept an alternative. Changing the course of these personality influences can be impossible as the child reaches maturity.

For the purposes of **Æon**, your character's Nature should rarely shift. It might change only after long-term influence from outside forces, in-depth "soul searching" or after a particularly traumatic event.

If you wish to change your character's Nature, discuss it with the Storyteller so the adjustment may be tied into the game. Whatever the specific circumstance, the change should be a dramatic story element.

Changing Allegiance

Allegiance indicates a group with which one shares a similar outlook. Loyalties give an individual a sense of place, and help in guidance and decision making. However, that individual can't help but be exposed to differing views throughout life. These alternate viewpoints can cause a person to switch allegiances or to reinforce her existing loyalties.

In **Æon**, a change of Allegiance is not uncommon, but it is a rare event nonetheless. Changing Allegiance requires that your character's current worldview has altered significantly from her previous one. Adjusting a character's Allegiance should happen only after experiencing strong external influences, after extensive contemplation or after a dramatic incident.

Increasing Willpower

Willpower is a quantified Trait that may be increased with experience points. However, this Trait should not increase

without some logical reason. A traumatic event may harden your character's heart, strengthening her resolve. Focus and meditation could lead to an improved understanding of her core being. In short, events during roleplay have a direct effect on Willpower, much like they do on any other Trait. The main difference between Willpower and other Traits is that Willpower cannot be researched or taught. Increases in Willpower should never be approved casually by the Storyteller.

Increasing Psi

Combining elements of the physical, mental and social, Psi defines a character's psionic potential. Increasing Psi should be as difficult and singular as undergoing the Prometheus Effect that unleashed it. Only those with the greatest dedication can stretch their mental limits.

While Psi may be increased through research, meditation and experiencing the ebb and flow of events, such things vary among individuals and cannot be quantified easily. Each character's path of Psi development is a solitary one, and follows a path as unique as that person. Insight into the connection between otherwise disparate events, understanding the relationships between people, and glimpses into the resonance that binds all things are the keys to blossoming Psi.

As always, the Storyteller has final say as to whether spending experience points in this area has been justified in the game.

Traits register your character's capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. While little more than marks on paper, Traits enable you to translate a complex personality into the strictures of game reality. This framework gives you the general parameters of what your character can accomplish, but your imagination and roleplaying shape what he actually does. **Æon** Traits are designed to be broad; this game is about characters, not statistics.

The previous chapter outlined the character creation and development process; this chapter contains all the Traits you may choose from to design your character.

Nature

Nature is a basic description of your character's self-perception; no character fits any Nature exactly, but one usually describes his concept well. Nature isn't all that a character is about. Rather, it serves as a basic guide to your character's perspective on the **Æon** universe, and how to act in and react to that universe.

While Nature helps describe who your character really is on the inside, this may not be the face he presents to the world. However, a person's mood and demeanor can change depending on whom he's with and what situation he's in. Your character's outward personality is handled entirely through roleplaying (although his Nature should accent his general disposition).

In game terms, Nature is important because it enables the character to regain Willpower points. Each Nature archetype lists the criteria necessary to gain Willpower. See **Personality Traits**, page 190, for specifics on spending and recovering Willpower.

The archetypes listed here are a small sample of the many faces of humanity. Feel free to create new Natures if desired.

• **Analyst:** You approach the universe as a riddle to be answered. You live by logic and deduction; any problem can be solved in a rational manner. Your goal is to uncover the truth, to understand everything. However, your intense interest in finding the answers to questions can be distracting, since you get caught up by minutiae and may lose sight of the larger issue.

Gain Willpower when a rational, scientific approach helps solve a situation.

• **Architect:** You are driven to create something of lasting value for those who come after you, whether you create a new social order, a company, art or some other legacy. Disorder and decay are your enemies; you hope to bring about order and progress through your efforts. If you become fixated on your goal, you may force your dream on others.

Gain Willpower when you accomplish a significant goal.

• **Bravo:** There are winners and losers in life, and you are definitely a winner. You reinforce your self-worth by dominating situations, whether they're physical brawls or political intrigues. You might terrorize or protect the weak, but such weakness is not something you tolerate in yourself. You don't know the meaning of fear, and failure is not an option. Then again, you're not sure what discretion means either, and compromise isn't on your list of choices.

Gain Willpower whenever you make someone else back down.

• **Bureaucrat:** Laws were created for a reason, and your primary concern is to follow them. No matter what the crisis, you follow the proper procedure. If people don't obey the System, chaos will run rampant. You take comfort in established processes, confident that they are the key to victory. Strict adherence to policy may blind you to better options.

Gain Willpower when a crisis is resolved by following correct procedures.

• **Caregiver:** You always try to make a difference, helping those around you — and they depend on you for it. You're not blind to the flaws of others; if anything, that makes your desire to aid them stronger. You gain strength from knowing that you make a difference, that you ease the suffering in the world. Yet you have nowhere to turn for support.

Gain Willpower when you receive tangible proof that you have helped another.

• **Conniver:** Why break your own back when you can talk someone else into breaking his for you? You always try to manipulate others before applying yourself. You advance your cause by coordinating your friends' efforts and sowing dissent among your enemies. You fear that others may be doing exactly the same thing to you, making it difficult for you to trust anyone.

Gain Willpower when you trick someone into doing what you want.

• **Critic:** You find purpose in revealing weaknesses and faults, whether in artwork, an organization or in a person's habits. You strive to perfect others by pointing out their shortcomings. You do this for their good, whether they want your help or not. You can do your job too well, convincing someone that he isn't just flawed but worthless, perhaps driving away even those closest to you.

Gain Willpower when you point out a significant flaw that would have been harmful had it been overlooked.

• **Explorer:** The prospect of finding new places, people and things — whether it's a new

natural resource, an alien race or a musical style — gives your life meaning. Discoveries are your passion, and you devote a great deal of time and effort to keeping up with current events. The routine and commonplace bore you, and learning of someone else's discovery fills you with envy. Your sights are constantly set on the horizon, sometimes at the expense of the here and now.

Gain Willpower whenever you make a significant discovery.

• **Follower:** Leaders need followers, and you await your orders. Taking charge isn't your style. It isn't in your nature to rebel. In fact, your strength comes from your ability to cooperate with a variety of personalities toward a common cause. Yet, while you might follow your commander into a sun, you tend to lack the self-esteem to question such a suicidal act.

Gain Willpower if you help the team succeed because you carry out your assigned duty.

• **Hedonist:** Life is too important to waste, so have as good a time as possible. You only go around once, after all. You don't mind a little hard work as long as a good time awaits you at the end of it. Pleasure is its own reward, and you pity those who take life too seriously to realize this. Even so, your pursuit of a good time can take you too far.

Gain Willpower whenever you have a truly good time (and bring others along for the ride).

• **Jester:** The only sane defense against an insane universe is to laugh at it all. Sorrow and pain are your enemies, and humor is your weapon. You act the fool, the comic, to take others' minds off gloom and despair. In your pursuit to spread smiles, you may cross the line, distracting and irritating those whom you mean to entertain.

Gain Willpower whenever you can lighten the mood or ease a tense situation.

• **Judge:** You seek to solve the problems of others by acting as a mediator, arbitrator or even a friend. You pride yourself on your clear judgment and ability to find compromises. Conflict and dissent are abhorrent to you; you know there is always an option to which everyone can agree. Your greatest fear is that you may use poor judgment; thinking this way can make you doubt even the most obvious of choices.

Gain Willpower any time you lead others to an amicable resolution.

• **Leader:** You're meant to be in charge. You excel at organizing, and others look to you for direction. You trust your own judgment implicitly, and have no qualms about taking over a project and shaping it the way you see fit. There are two ways to do a job: your way and the wrong way. While you may be a master of direction, ignoring others' suggestions could be your downfall.

Gain Willpower when others follow you without disputing your decisions.

• **Martyr:** You're ready to put yourself at risk so that others or a cause succeeds, even when the sacrifice isn't necessary. You drive yourself twice as hard as anyone else does, expecting no reward other than recognition of your efforts. Despite this suffering, you endure, clinging firmly to the belief that you make a difference. In your blind desire to throw yourself into the breach, you could sacrifice yourself for nothing.

Gain Willpower whenever you sacrifice yourself or something of yours to a higher goal.

• **Rebel:** You're the ultimate free thinker. Whether you champion a cause or simply feel contrary, you choose your own path. Others are welcome to join your march to a different drummer, but only if their beat matches yours. You defy authority in principle and deed, even if you have similar views.

Gain Willpower whenever you act to defy an established authority.

• **Survivor:** You can endure nearly any circumstance. No matter what happens, you always persevere. Never say die and never give up — ever. You have no time for those who crumble at the first sign of adversity. In fact, to be safe, you avoid forming close ties with others. You'll pull through whatever the odds, even if it means sacrificing others.

Gain Willpower whenever you survive a difficult situation through your own cunning and perseverance.

• **Thrillseeker:** You do things, not for the ends, but for the rush that the means provides. Risk gives your life meaning, and boredom is death. The stakes are never so high that they can't be made higher. As long as there's a thrill in it, you're willing to pay almost any price. Paybacks are a bitch, though, and you will get in over your head sooner or later.

Gain Willpower every time you put yourself in a life-threatening situation and then escape it.

• **Traditionalist:** You believe the solutions for today's problems can be found by applying the methods of the past. Constant change destroys instead of creates. You wrap yourself in tradition, resisting innovations and breakthroughs. Not all change is bad, though; in holding too tightly to old ways, you can miss something better.

Gain Willpower when a tried-and-true method proves effective.

• **Visionary:** You have a goal that only you can see, something to which you've dedicated your life. You may be a spiritualist, philosopher or inventor, but whatever you are, you search for something more. You create new possibilities by seeing beyond the bounds of conventional imagination. Though you are full of new ideas, your head is often among the stars.

Gain Willpower whenever you take a concrete step toward realizing your goal.

Allegiance

Allegiance represents the ideals your character has developed or adopted. It isn't all-encompassing, but does indicate your character's general worldview. Allegiance is a guide to how your character views other groups and relates to them in a broad sense. It isn't an indication of personal loyalty, but it does influence initial reactions to and sweeping judgments of groups outside your character's own. (Nature affects these perceptions as well, so no two individuals with the same Allegiance react to the same situation in the same way.)

While Allegiance indicates a bias, it is not a rigid mentality (although some characters may choose to make it such). Like Nature, Allegiance accents your character's disposition toward certain types of people, but the specific interactions are always resolved through roleplaying.

Your character's Allegiance determines the Ability group that you may choose from when assigning Abilities.

The Allegiances that follow detail the outlooks held by the six psi orders, as well as that conveyed by the Æon Trinity. Don't be limited to holding Allegiances to only these groups; Allegiances can be had for governments, corporations or other groups if you wish.

• **Æsculapian:** Vitakinetics are dedicated to the care of others, but docs feel that their psionic mastery of biology is the key to defeating the Aberrants (if the Æsculapians can isolate the Mazarin-Rashoud node's power, Aberrants would no longer be a threat). The vitakinetics think others should support them in their research, no matter where such studies take them.

• **ISRA:** Clairsentients are protectors. They search out threats, both external and internal, and lend their talents to those who ask or who merely exhibit a need. ISRAns want no glory or special treatment. Clairsentients do expect their predictions to be given the utmost attention and to be responded to in a respectful and timely manner.

• **The Legions:** Psychokinetics are extremely proud of their powers. They are humanity's first and best line of defense. Legionnaires are very forthright, and don't trust those who seem to have hidden agendas. Psychokinetics don't consider themselves above the law, but they're not adverse to using their status as psions to get whatever perks they can.

• **The Ministry:** Telepaths weed out the corrupt and dangerous. Encouraging a healthy fear of telepathic powers helps keep the populace in line, although it creates a distrust for telepaths as well. Ministry agents are somewhat bitter and cold. Their powers could allow them to establish intimate relationships with others, but they choose to isolate themselves physically and emotionally.

• **Norça:** Biokinetics search for and eradicate the subtle menaces of the universe, the ones that others overlook. They have their own code of ethics and laws,

viewing others' rules as unnecessary or restrictive. The Norça are determined to discover the secret to defeating the Aberrants. The biokinetics are content to let the other orders bask in the limelight, since it enables the Norça to pursue their goals in the shadows.

• **Orgotek:** Electrokinetics are as dedicated to defending against Aberrants as any other psions are. However, they are the most practical of the Gifted. Establishing authority over all normals, from individuals to powerful governments, is just as important as fighting Aberrants on the front lines. Electrokinetics are not above political maneuvers, social networking or corporate warfare to give psions (and especially themselves) every possible advantage.

• **Æon Trinity:** Trinity members must unite warring nations, scheming corporations, enigmatic aliens and bickering orders against that which would destroy them all. Agents must use every resource at their disposal to convince these disparate peoples and agencies to follow Æon's vision for the future. Only the Trinity truly understands what must be done so that humanity may endure and flourish.

Attributes

Attributes are your character's essential qualities, translated into numerical ratings. In the real world, nobody has 4 Charisma or 2 Intelligence. We have capabilities and potentials, not statistics. However, such faculties must be translated into numbers for the sake of the game; the trick is to not let the statistics get in the way of the story. After all, a character with 4 Charisma may be vivacious, charming, magnetic or suave. Traits may show what your character can *do*, but they don't indicate what your character is *like*. That's what roleplaying is all about.

Humans' Attributes typically range from one to four dots, with two being average. The Prometheus Effect, which all psions undergo, enhances parts of a character's genetic code. Many psions' Attribute scores average slightly higher than the human norm as a result; psions' Attributes can be as high as 5.

Qualities

You may select a *Quality* for each of your character's Attributes rated four or higher. A Quality reflects a Trait's aspect in which a person is remarkable, like Flexible (Dexterity), Suave (Charisma) or Discerning (Intelligence).

A Quality allows you to re-roll any "10s" you roll for actions when that Quality comes into play (like wriggling out of bindings for Flexible, impressing others for Suave or noting the relative worth of gems for Discerning). Any successes gained on the additional rolls are added to your total (including the original "10s"). And if you roll another "10" on a re-roll, you keep rolling! Only one Quality may be chosen per Attribute.

Physical Attributes

Physical Traits indicate a character's raw strength, build, agility and sturdiness. Characters adept at physical combat or athletic activities have high Physical Attributes.

Strength

Strength rates physical power, including the capacity to lift objects and cause damage. This Attribute is used to resolve jumps, leaps and other actions that draw on raw physical power. Strength also determines the base number of damage effect dice rolled for successful melee and brawl attacks.

Qualities: Athletic, Brutish, Rugged, Stout, Well-built, Wiry

•	Poor: Puny human (dead lift 15 kg).
••	Average: That about says it all (dead lift 45 kg).
•••	Good: You don't look silly in a Speedo (dead lift 100 kg).
••••	Exceptional: You're constantly enlisted to help friends move (dead lift 165 kg).
•••••	Superb: You can knock out a prizefighter with one shot (dead lift 240 kg).

Dexterity

Dexterity measures both fine and large motor skills. It describes how fast a character runs, how precisely he aims at a target, and everything else that relates to speed, grace and control. Dexterity also determines the base number of dice rolled to determine accuracy in combat, and is combined with Wits to calculate Initiative.

Qualities: Coordinated, Delicate, Fast, Flexible, Nimble, Steady

•	Poor: You cut yourself just by looking at sharp objects.
••	Average: You can dance without stepping on your partner's toes.
•••	Good: You make zero-g maneuvers look easy.
••••	Exceptional: You can juggle knives with flair.
•••••	Superb: You can actually juggle knives in zero-g.

Stamina

Stamina indicates your character's general health, tolerance for pain and how long he can maintain physical exertion. It encompasses endurance, physical will to live and ability to survive hardships. Stamina also determines base Bashing soak, and is a factor of Psi score.

Qualities: Determined, Enduring, Energetic, Resilient, Tenacious, Unflagging

- • Poor: You catch colds as a matter of course.
- •• Average: You stay in moderately good health.
- ••• Good: You seldom get sick, and heal quickly.
- •••• Exceptional: Your constant vigor tends to irritate others.
- ••••• Superb: You enter triathlons when you're bored.

Mental Attributes

Mental Traits cover a character's perception, mental capacity, imagination and quick wits. Creative and intellectual individuals have high Mental Attributes.

Perception

Perception covers alertness and comprehension. It determines not only your character's attentiveness to the world around him, but also how clearly he interprets it.

Qualities: Astute, Insightful, Intuitive, Nitpicky, Observant, Patient

- • Poor: You misplace your keys routinely — in your own pockets.
- •• Average: You keep abreast of general goings-on.
- ••• Good: You can recognize the subtext in books and conversations.
- •••• Exceptional: Your keen eye can pick out even the most subtle of flaws.
- ••••• Superb: Sherlock Holmes was an amateur compared to you.

Intelligence

Intelligence measures raw mental processes — memory, retention, judgment, reasoning and imagination. It is your character's ability to find connections between seemingly unrelated pieces of information, as well as the capacity to analyze complex ideas. This Attribute is not a measure of how fast your character thinks, but of how clearly he thinks.

Qualities: Bookworm, Bright, Clear-headed, Discerning, Pragmatic, Rational

- • Poor: Numbers frighten you (IQ 80).
- •• Average: You remember family birthdays (IQ 100).
- ••• Good: You know even the most obscure baseball trivia (IQ 130).
- •••• Exceptional: Quantum physics and noetic theory make sense to you (IQ 160).
- ••••• Superb: Geniuses come to you when they're stumped (IQ 200+).

Wits

Wits ranks how quickly your character reacts to new situations, and indicates general "grace under fire." This Attribute describes inherent common sense and how well your character thinks on the fly. Wits is a factor of Psi score. It is also combined with Dexterity to determine base Initiative.

Qualities: Clever, Creative, Cunning, Ingenious, Level-headed, Shrewd

- • Poor: You were born yesterday.
- •• Average: You know to quit while you're ahead.
- ••• Good: You keep your cool in a firefight — and even when baby-sitting.
- •••• Exceptional: You need a weapon permit for your razor-sharp wit.
- ••••• Superb: You react to even the most dire circumstance with enviable flair.

Social Attributes

Social Traits describe a character's influence, force of personality and looks. They often define interactions with others, from first impressions to leadership to dealing with people in general.

Appearance

Appearance is a combination of physical attractiveness and innate appeal. Call it animal magnetism or attractiveness, Appearance is your character's ability to make a good first impression or to simply generate a visceral response in others.

Qualities: Alluring, Exotic, Imposing, Luminous, Pleasant, Sensual

- • Poor: People suppress a cringe when they see you.
- •• Average: Just that — another face in the crowd.
- ••• Good: You turn heads when you enter a room.
- •••• Exceptional: Both genders readily admit to your attractiveness.
- ••••• Superb: You are famous across settled space for your beauty.

Manipulation

Manipulation measures the ability to influence others. This is an aggressive persuasiveness, and can be subtle or blatant. Manipulation covers everything from leading others to tricking them, from being sly to dominating. No one likes being fooled, though, so failing a Manipulation roll has risks.

Qualities: Authoritative, Cunning, Devious, Domineering, Persuasive, Witty

- • Poor: You have trouble getting your own way.
- •• Average: You get your way occasionally.
- ••• Good: You always get your way.
- •••• Exceptional: Politicians envy your devious nature.
- ••••• Superb: You are a master of misdirection and cunning.

Charisma

Charisma is used to charm others and to gain trust through natural appeal; your character's "force of personality," if you will. It reflects an air of confidence or social grace when dealing with people. Charisma defines how likable your character is to others, and whether they actively seek his company. It also determines Psi.

Qualities: Charming, Cool, Eloquent, Genial, Polite, Suave

- • Poor: Your pets barely tolerate you.
- •• Average: You're likable enough.
- ••• Good: You're the life of the party.
- •••• Exceptional: Even your enemies respect you.
- ••••• Superb: Others marvel at your unflappable charm and grace.

Abilities

Skill starts with raw potential (represented by an Attribute), combined with training or education (designated by an *Ability*). Abilities are grouped under the Attributes to which they relate most closely. When you perform an action, your Dice Pool is the combination of the appropriate base Attribute and the Ability most suited to the task (there may be exceptions to this on occasion; see **Cross-Matching Attributes and Abilities**, page 159). This combined rating is called the *Skill Total*.

Abilities are rated from • to ••••• and are added to your character's Attributes. This combination can result in Skill Totals up to 10, maximum. Even one dot in an Ability implies at least basic proficiency. Although each Ability functions differently, all follow a similar scale of mastery.

- x Unskilled: No training in the Ability; rely on natural talent (default to related Attribute).
- • Novice: A basic grasp of the Ability; suitable for hobbies.
- •• Practiced: General familiarity with the Ability's applications; adequate professional training.
- ••• Competent: Detailed comprehension of the Ability's potential; skilled professional capacity.
- •••• Expert: Profound understanding of virtually all of the Ability's aspects; peak talent in the field.
- ••••• Master: Utter command of every possible way in which the Ability could be used; peerless mastery of the subject.

Specialties

Each Ability represents a fairly broad area of knowledge; it's unlikely that an individual would be equally skilled in all aspects of an entire category. To reflect this, Abilities have *Specialties*, or areas of expertise. Specialties differ from Qualities in that the former are areas of special training, while the latter are simply innate aspects of the individual.

Specialties are bought with bonus and/or experience points. You may purchase a maximum of three Specialties for each Ability. Refer to **Chapter Two: Character**, page 168, for bonus point and experience costs. If you buy your character a Specialty, simply write it after the Ability on your character sheet. Choosing Specialties beyond those listed are subject to Storyteller approval.

Once purchased, a Specialty gives your character an extra die on all rolls related to that distinct qualification. A character with 2 Drive (Hover) has two dice added to his Dexterity for driving rolls, but since he's specialized in hover vehicles, three dice are added to his Dexterity when driving hovercraft.

Strength Abilities

• **Brawl:** This skill covers styles of unarmed combat that rely more on power than on speed; they range from trained boxing to street fighting to wrestling. Brawl inflicts Bashing damage, so while it isn't immediately fatal it can inflict a fair amount of pain.

Specialties: Blind Fighting, Combinations, Dirty Maneuvers, Multiple Opponents, Zero-g Fighting

• **Might:** This Ability encompasses physical fitness and feats of focused muscle power. It rates lifting, climbing, jumping and throwing competence. While such tasks can be accomplished with brute force, Might helps your character use his physical power to maximum effect.

Specialties: Climb, Dead Lift, Leap, Throw

Dexterity Abilities

• **Athletics:** A measure of fitness, this Ability concentrates on skills requiring balance, coordination and good reflexes. Athletics training can cover skill in various sports activities, knowing how to dodge and tumble or being able to maneuver in a microgravity environment.

Specialties: Acrobatics, Dodge, Gymnastics, Specific Sports, Tumbling, Zero-g

• **Drive:** Most people are familiar with the basics of driving. This Ability gives you a detailed understanding of a vehicle's operation, including performing tricky maneuvers, driving at high speeds and engaging in pursuits.

Specialties: Crawler, Cycle, Hover, Maglev, Track, Wheeled

• **Firearms:** This Ability covers weapon operation and basic maintenance, from personal sidearms to assault carbines to vehicle-mounted artillery. Weapons also fall into two main categories: projectile weapons (also called "slugthrowers") and energy weapons (usually called "lasers"). Weapons handle somewhat differently based on these categories as well as size, caliber and ammunition type. In the end, though, it mainly comes down to basic coordination and aim.

Specialties: Blind Fire, Cover Fire, Multiple Fire, Multiple Targets, Targeting, Zero-g Fire

• **Legerdemain:** This Ability describes skill with sleight of hand. Legerdemain is very useful for performing parlor magic, card tricks, filching small objects, switching items and even picking pockets. Legerdemain rolls are often made as resisted actions against a target's Awareness.

Specialties: Card Tricks, Palm Object, Parlor Magic, Pick Pockets, Switch Object

• **Martial Arts:** This fighting Ability covers hand-to-hand styles such as Aikido, Capoeira, Judo, Karate, Kung Fu, Tae Kwon Do, Thai Kick Boxing and more. Martial Arts styles inflict Bashing damage. While it encourages speed over power, this Ability is as dangerous as any Brawl style.

Specialties: Blind Fighting, Combinations, Dirty Maneuvers, Multiple Opponents, Zero-g Fighting

• **Melee:** A broad term for understanding the proper use of hand-to-hand armed combat, and the proper care of weapons. Melee weapons range from knives to clubs to bottles.

Specialties: Axe, Chain, Club, Improvised Weapon, Knife, Nunchaku, Staff, Sword

• **Pilot:** This Ability imparts skill in piloting airborne, stellar and submersible vehicles. Pilot covers not only basic control, but also complicated maneuvers and combat techniques. Handling a craft in an atmosphere differs from maneuvering in space or under water, but all involve similar rudimentary piloting functions.

Specialties: Freighter, Frigate, Hybrid, Jet, Jump ship, Rotor, Submersible

• **Stealth:** Stealth covers the capability to avoid notice, move quietly, trail someone and generally evade detection. Stealth rolls are usually made as resisted actions against another character's Awareness.

Specialties: Ambush, Camouflage, Hiding in Shadows, Sneak, Trail

Stamina Abilities

• **Endurance:** This talent describes the capability to endure long-term exposure to severe conditions. This Ability differs from Resistance in that Endurance sustains your character's energy level over long periods of time.

Specialties: Fasting, Holding Breath, Long-distance Exertion, Sleep Loss

• **Resistance:** Resistance allows your character to temporarily combat the effects of physical pain or chemicals. This Ability can be used to restore lost dice due to injury (although such Resistance rolls are not cumulative), and to resist interrogation.

Specialties: Ignore Pain, Resist Disease, Resist Drugs, Resist Interrogation

Perception Abilities

• **Awareness:** This Ability indicates how much your character notices his surroundings. It's a mea-

sure of knowing what's physically nearby, covering input from all five senses. Awareness is useful for picking out a face in a crowd or for anticipating surprises that wait around a corner.

Specialties: Acute Hearing, Keeping Watch, Sharp Sight, Smell, Spot Ambush, Track

• **Investigation:** Investigation is the skill of searching for relevant clues or information, whether at a crime scene, in a library or through speaking to witnesses. This Ability is vital to reconstruct (or uncover) events to gain insight into what really happened at a scene.

Specialties: Analysis, Concealed Objects, Deduction, Interviews, Quick Search, Research

Intelligence Abilities

• **Academics:** Schooling reflects education in a given area of knowledge, such as history, law or accounting. This Ability rates degree of understanding of the topic, and status in the field.

Specialties: Anthropology, Business, Culture, Current Events, Geography, History, Law, Organization, Philosophy, Politics, Religion

• **Bureaucracy:** This is a measure of understanding of general administration and the bureaucratic process. This Ability enables your character to utilize the system beyond simple organizational skills to best achieve his own ends (and to prevent others from achieving theirs).

Specialties: Administration, Procedures, Regulations, Requisition, Rumors

• **Engineering:** Engineering rates your comprehension of electronic and mechanical devices. Your character not only understands how computers, vehicles, robots and other machines operate, but he can repair, modify and construct them.

Specialties: Armaments, Bioapps, Bioships, Computers, Construction, Electronics, Energy Sources, Mechanics, Telecommunications

• **Intrusion:** Intrusion indicates knowledge of and ability to set up or avoid various security systems, and to set infiltration measures and countermeasures. Such understanding ranges from basic lock picking to advanced electronic systems.

Specialties: Countermeasures, Electronic Infiltration, Lock Picking, Security Procedures

• **Linguistics:** An indication of the languages that your character knows. Linguistics also imparts a basic understanding of language systems. Due to the truly staggering number of languages that exist, specialization in Linguistics operates differently than do the Specialties of other Abilities. Your character does not automatically understand all languages. Dots indicate an understanding of language "families" beyond native tongue. You must choose a language "family," and your character may comprehend tongues within that spe-

cific "family" (e.g., while Mandarin, Cantonese and Wu are different languages, they all belong to the Chinese language "family").

Your character knows an additional language family for each dot in this Ability (so at ●●●●●, five language families are known in addition to native tongue). Rolls are needed only to understand complex writing or speech, although a high Linguistics rating should reduce this necessity. The Specialties listed indicate most major language families.

Specialties: Arabic, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese, Qin, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Turkish

• **Medicine:** This Ability details how well your character knows how the human body works, and how to repair it in case of injury. Medicine also includes an understanding of drugs and their use, along with the diagnosis and treatment of diseases and injuries.

Such knowledge can be used to harm as well as heal. Characters may use Medicine to take advantage of an opponent's injury, to apply harmful drugs (or helpful drugs in lethal doses) or to encourage a greater degree of illness in a subject due to improper treatment. Such attempts should be attended closely by the Storyteller.

Specialties: Emergency, First Aid, Pharmacy, Specialized Fields (Neurology, Oncology, etc.), Surgery

• **Science:** Beyond an understanding of scientific theory, this Ability measures how well your character can put such knowledge to practical use. Science can be used to investigate advanced concepts or to cobble together a pipe bomb out of household chemicals.

Specialties: Astrogation, Astronomy, Biology, Botany, Chemistry, Geology, Mathematics, Noetics, Physics, Xenobiology, Zoology

• **Survival:** This Ability is extremely useful to explorers and colonists. It enables your character to subsist in wilderness environments. He knows how to set traps, forage for food and water, build fires and to separate dangerous flora and fauna from beneficial ones.

Specialties: Fire-Building, Forage, Hunt, Navigation, Set Traps, Track

Wits Abilities

• **Arts:** Arts rates level of talent in the visual or creative arts, from drawing to writing to sculpture. This Ability also imparts knowledge of the culture and society of a particular art form.

Specialties: Composition, Design, Drawing, Painting, Poetry, Sculpture, Writing

• **Meditation:** This Ability helps focus and center thoughts, but can also be used to enter a hibernation trance, to catch up on lost sleep and even to regain Psi. There are countless ways to practice Meditation, from the traditional to the esoteric, but all strive to create a calm and relaxing feeling. Meditation can be performed in almost any environment (although rowdy conditions make it difficult), and usually takes from 10 minutes to half an hour to have any benefits.

Specialties: Contemplate, Hibernate, Psi Recovery, Rest

• **Rapport:** Rapport is used to help sense and understand peoples' feelings. This Ability is not a psi power; it uses your character's own understanding of emotions and people to get an accurate reading of what others are feeling.

Specialties: Discern Motivation, Discern Truth, Emotional State, Intent

Appearance Abilities

• **Intimidation:** This Ability enables you to coerce another into doing your will, whether through subtle menace or an outright threat. Whether you plan to follow through on your threat is not important as long as your subject truly believes that you will.

Specialties: Breaking Things, Innuendo, Silent Urging, Threats, Yelling

• **Style:** First impressions are important, and they are usually based on physical appearance. Style is more than simply presenting one's self to best effect. Beyond relating an awareness of proper fashions (clothing, hair, makeup, accessories) and how to accentuate appearance, Style can also be used to alter appearance using those same tools — even to the point of disguising one's self as someone else.

Specialties: Disguise, Fashion, Makeup, Seduction

Manipulation Abilities

• **Command:** Command is not only the ability to lead others, but also an indication of how willingly they follow your character. The better the ability to command, the more amenable people are to your character's decisions (even in extreme situations). Commands may be polite requests, written directives or strict orders.

Specialties: Discipline, Field Command, Motivating Others, Political Leadership, Social Direction, Tactics

• **Interrogation:** Interrogation covers ways to draw information from a subject by manipulation, force, drugs or torture. Some techniques are more effective than others at breaking a subject's resolve, but may leave him permanently disabled or dead.

Specialties: Drugs, Misdirection, Threats, Torture

• **Subterfuge:** This Ability rates how well your character bends the truth and disguises his motives. Subterfuge also helps to sense when others are doing the same. Subterfuge can be used to separate gossip from truth and to discover if a person is lying.

Specialties: Con, Deception, Gossip, Lying, Seduction

Charisma Abilities

• **Etiquette:** This measures understanding of the nuances and dynamics of polite society in a myriad of social circumstances. Etiquette combines grace and

manners, and is useful during diplomatic engagements, formal gatherings and in other encounters with "cultured society."

Specialties: Diplomacy, Negotiation, Social Graces, Tact

• **Perform:** Perform covers the gamut of live artistic expression, from public speaking to dancing to acting (including impersonating someone else). This Ability also imparts knowledge of the society surrounding a particular art form, and how well your character fits in it.

Specialties: Acting, Dance, Impersonation, Oration, Singing, Specific Instrument

• **Savvy:** Savvy rates knowledge of and skill in interacting with society's underbelly. This is the art of knowing what is needed, who has it and the ways that it can be acquired. Savvy helps your character fit in even in an unfamiliar city or spaceport, giving him an understanding of attitudes and customs common on the streets and on the low-class decks of orbital stations and ships.

Specialties: Black Market, Customs, Fence, Information, Scrounge, Street Trade

Backgrounds

Backgrounds are not associated directly with your character's inherent capabilities, but are key elements of who he is nonetheless. They help define his history and current circumstances.

Backgrounds tie closely to character concept; both relate to past and present situation. You must give each Background some sort of context beyond just a dot rating. After all, Allies, Contacts and Mentors have their own lives in this universe, Gear and Resources don't just appear magically, and Influence and Status aren't handed out without reason.

Your Storyteller should have input into your choices. If your series begins before your character experiences the Prometheus Effect, Mentor or Status may be inappropriate. Alternatively, if the characters form an elite squad, they may need a few dots in each of these Backgrounds. Ultimately, Backgrounds help the Storyteller ensure that the characters fit the series, and that they complement one another.

You may need to roll for a task relating to a Background on occasion (say, to see if Allies can come to your character's aid, or if he can afford a new piece of equipment). In such instances, the Storyteller chooses the Ability that she feels best suits the task (Command, Intimidation, Etiquette or Subterfuge may be appropriate for the first example depending on how your character presents himself; Bureaucracy, Savvy or Technology are good options for the second). Alternatively, the Storyteller may have you roll your character's Background rating (Allies or Resources, to continue the examples).

Allies

Almost everyone has at least one close friend. *Allies* are people with whom your character has intimate ties; friends, loved ones or simply someone with similar interests to whom he can turn for assistance and support. Almost everyone has acquaintances and friends, but Allies represent truly dedicated individuals with whom your character has close bonds. However, Allies are not other members of the team; relationships with other players' characters are roleplayed.

Allies are people in their own right, with lives as involved as your character's. Friendship is a two-way street, and if your character takes but doesn't give, Allies are likely to desert him. Allies do what they can to help you, but don't throw their lives away for nothing. They may also grow weary of repeated demands on their time and resources. Allies can also call for assistance.

Each dot represents one Ally (instead of signifying multiple Allies, high ratings could represent a more powerful Ally). An Ally may be a fellow psion, detective, politician, soldier, philanthropist or an old college pal. You should work with the Storyteller to detail the Ally since a well-developed supporting cast makes for rich roleplaying.

x	None; you skulk about, having no one close to turn to.
•	One Ally of moderate ability (equivalent to that of a starting character).
••	Two Allies, or one significant one.
•••	Three Allies, or fewer Allies of correspondingly high power.
••••	Four Allies, or fewer ones of great capability.
•••••	Five Allies (popular, aren't you?), or fewer ones of immense power.

Cipher

Although the Crash destroyed the vast, interconnected computer databases of the previous century, information is still more powerful than most armies. Knowing enemies can be the key to victory — just as being known by them can spell defeat. *Cipher* makes it hard to find your character in the chaotic realm of the OpNet. He is a nonentity, a zero, a spook — a veritable ghost in the machine. All the files pertaining to his past, perhaps even to his very existence, have been erased from (or were never entered into) information stores across settled space.

For every dot you possess in Cipher, the Storyteller adds an additional level of difficulty to any electronic investigations into your character. This Background may fluctuate if you don't maintain a certain level of secrecy. The Storyteller should determine if there's a risk that new information develops in the wake of your character's activities. Cipher can increase, and require maintenance, with roleplaying and advanced computer skills.

x	Normal; just like everybody else, anybody can read your life's story.
•	A couple of your secrets are well-hidden.
••	Your data trails are hard to follow.

•••	Name, rank and serial number are all anyone can find.
••••	Even you have trouble remembering.
•••••	As far as the OpNet is concerned, you don't exist.

Citizenship

The world is smaller than it has ever been. Ironically, the addition of extraglobal territories has brought human societies much closer. Walking from one end of a space station to another, your character might pass through four separate countries, each with its own laws on immigration and its own customs. Possessing *Citizenship* for a particular country allows your character to avoid the hassles normally associated with entering its territories. Although local security codes still apply, passage is a lot easier than it would be for a "foreigner." Possessing multiple Citizenships has not only become legal, it's a necessity.

Applying for and receiving Citizenship is a complicated process. No major country wants undesirables moving freely about its territories. Proving one's worth to prospective countries can be like selling ice to comet miners — they already have all they need. Each additional dot in Citizenship makes your character a legal citizen of another nation. If you have a 3 Citizenship, your character is a legal citizen of four nations (including his homeland).

x	Nationalist: Only your country of origin recognizes you.
•	Tourist: An additional country accepts you.
••	Jet-setter: You have Citizenship in three countries.
•••	Well-traveled: You are naturalized in four nations.
••••	Global recognition: Five countries open their doors to you.
•••••	Citizen of the world: Six countries claim you as a citizen.

Contacts

More casual than Allies, *Contacts* are people with whom your character has developed a mutually beneficial arrangement. Contacts use their talents, information or resources to help your character, but they always expect some favor in return. This favor could be a service, trade or even payment, but it generally matches the value of the Contact's assistance. These associates don't risk themselves as far as a Follower or even an Ally will (although a well-cultivated Contact could grow into one or the other over the course of the series).

Each dot represents major and minor Contacts. Major Contacts are primary individuals with whom your character interacts frequently. Major Contacts know him personally and are from any walk of life, of any field of study, with access to a variety of information and resources, and are willing to cut a deal. One could be a

data-retrieval specialist at the local library, a fence specializing in vehicles, or an agent of Æon's Proteus division with access to weapons. Minor Contacts specialize in fields of influence, like their major counterparts. They aren't as knowledgeable or resourceful, though, and may only know of your character by reputation or rumor, but may be willing to work out an arrangement.

Tracking down a major Contact doesn't usually require a dice roll, but finding a minor Contact does (typically Bureaucracy, Savvy or Etiquette). Whether or not a Contact feels inclined to help is another story, and depends on the request. Of course, the more Contacts possessed, the more people your character can go to in case one doesn't come through.

- x — No useful Contacts; you have to do your own legwork.
- • — One major Contact (with whom you likely have a special arrangement) and a few minor ones.
- •• — Two major Contacts in different areas, and a smattering of minor Contacts.
- ••• — Three major Contacts and a respectable number of minor ones.
- •••• — Four major Contacts in different areas (although you may double up in a given field) and a large number of minor Contacts.
- ••••• — Five major Contacts and a minor Contact virtually anywhere you care to look.

Devices

Devices are guns, bioware, computers and vehicles that have special functions or powers that separate them from common equipment. Devices are highly valuable since they are often prototypes or extreme modifications of existing gear. Each Device has some quality that clearly separates it from gear that anyone can purchase. If you choose this Background, you must create (with the Storyteller's assistance) a plausible reason why your character has a Device.

This Background may be purchased multiple times for different Devices. Each dot in an individual Device indicates the item's potency. Generally, Devices duplicate or enhance existing powers or processes, although you may create new capabilities (with the Storyteller's approval). A computer with a built-in laser or a ship with olaminium plating are both examples of Devices.

A Device's rating does not represent monetary worth. Such an item is unique, and as such is worth much more than the rating indicates. A Device on the open market is considered to be worth three dots higher than its Background rating. See **Buying Things**, page 259, for details on item costs.

- x — None; like most people, you have access to only standard-issue gear.
- • — A relatively insignificant but useful Device, like an enhanced computer agent.
- •• — A minor Device, like a double-firing laser.
- ••• — A Device of some note, such as a prototype ICE breaker computer agent.
- •••• — A significant Device with a reputation all its own; a souped up stellar freighter, perhaps.
- ••••• — A Device of singular power, like a fully interfaced, S1-capable bioVAS (bio-organic Vacuum Assault Suit).

Followers

Your character has one or more assistants, steadfast companions in his journeys. These disciples are drawn to him for any number of reasons. Perhaps they're in awe of his reputation, they seek to pay back some past favor, they want to learn from him, they're in it for the thrill, they're looking forward to a hefty paycheck, or they simply love your character.

Followers have some useful trade or skill (though not to the extent that Allies or Contacts do), and are loyal to a fault. Such individuals can think for themselves, but choose to stand by your character through thick and thin. Even so, poor treatment tests the patience of even the most devoted individual. A Follower who is constantly sent to check for ambushes or for faulty airlocks is bound to move on to a less abusive relationship (if she doesn't die first). Conversely, one treated with care and respect goes to tremendous lengths for your character.

Followers should not be psions, but can be humans of any origin, or even aliens. They should be as flawed and as real as any character. Since player and Storyteller essentially share the duty of playing a Follower, both must agree on the individual's history, personality and the relationship that exists with the psion. No Follower should ever be the perfect assistant, nor should she constantly save the day; she's meant to add flavor to the series, not take center stage.

- x — None; you haven't inspired anyone to rally to your banner.
- • — One Follower of average capability (equivalent to a typical extra).
- •• — Two Followers or a notable one.
- ••• — Three Followers or fewer disciples of significant ability.
- •••• — Four Followers or fewer ones of high power.
- ••••• — Five Followers or fewer ones of great ability.

Influence

Influence reflects your character's pull and status in normal society. This may derive from political office, running a business, or being an entertainer or even a religious figure. Whatever your character's specific credentials, people pay attention to his words and deeds.

Influence may be used to garner special favors from others, to promote a personal agenda in public or to simply get a good seat at the theater. Additionally, Influence may be drawn on to network and to make important connections — or even to draw more people under your character's sway.

This Background doesn't cover standing or sway in a private organization; that's handled by Status.

x	None; your 15 minutes of fame has yet to begin.
•	Moderately influential; you're a local celebrity.
••	Well-connected; you're a familiar face in the region.
•••	Influential; your name is recognized throughout your culture.
••••	Broad personal power; your words carry weight in most "civilized" territories.
•••••	Vastly influential; you're an icon to billions throughout explored space.

Mentor

A *Mentor* is many things: a patron, teacher, defender and friend. Your character may see one or all of these facets at any given time. Your character's relationship with his Mentor is quite different from that with an Ally, Contact or Follower. While a Mentor won't always respond to your character's requests for help, she always acts in his best interests (or what *she* considers best). A Mentor-student relationship is a complex and personal association that entails responsibilities on both sides. It should be the subject of involved roleplaying.

A Mentor may be a high-ranking psion of your character's order or even someone seemingly unrelated to his circumstances who has taken a special interest in his development. A mentor may teach Modes or Abilities or make information or resources available depending on her capabilities and means. She may also serve as your character's advocate in dealing with a particular organization, or may simply show up in time to pull him out of a tight spot. It's advisable not to rely on a Mentor too much, though.

The rating of this Background reflects a Mentor's helpfulness. A minor patron is better than none (usually); a more significant Mentor has a correspondingly higher rating. Even so, a low-ranking Mentor can be a powerful influence in your character's growth.

x	None; you haven't caught anyone's attention or you haven't found a patron worthy of *your* attention.
•	Like an older sibling, your Mentor is just a bit more worldly and wise than you are, and has a few connections.
••	A figure of some note, but no great power.
•••	A seasoned individual, your Mentor is wise and moderately influential.
••••	Canny and respected, your Mentor has significant clout.
•••••	Your Mentor is a major player in 22nd-century society.

Resources

Resources are a general indication of financial assets, but are more than monetary wealth. Money can be gained and lost; this Background includes such things as property, clothing and basic equipment, as well as how easily your character can acquire more. While Resources are not entirely liquid assets, possessions can be sold to gain money (though this may take some time depending on what is for sale).

Each Resource level conveys a standard income beyond any gear or wealth your character gains during play. The source of this stipend must be detailed (order, employment, an inheritance, investments), since it may be increased, reduced or cut off entirely depending on events in the series. Wealth is listed in new yuan (¥); the actual currency may differ depending on your character's origin.

Your character's Resources rating does not translate directly into money for purchasing items.

Buying Things, page 259, covers general item costs and how to buy gear.

x	None: You are destitute, without income — face it, you're broke.
•	Small savings: You have a tiny apartment and maybe an old used car or skimmer. If you liquidated all your possessions, you'd have about ¥5,000 in credit.
••	Comfortable: You have a respectable flat or own a small dwelling and probably a reliable skimmer. If liquidated, all this would yield ¥50,000 in credit.
•••	Affluent: You own a house, stellar freighter or other sizable equity. If liquidated, these items would yield ¥750,000 in credit.
••••	Wealthy: You own a significant amount of property (a small outpost colony or living complex). You'd have 1.5 million yuan in credit if all of this was liquidated.
•••••	Amazingly rich: You have more money than you know what to do with. If you liquidated everything, you'd have at least 20 million yuan in credit.

Status

Status reflects standing in an organization (an order, a government agency or the Æon Trinity). This Background is less a measure of actual capability or achievement than it is of perceived influence or rank.

You may take Status multiple times for rank in different organizations. With this rank comes responsibility; if your character has high Status, he is likely to be responsible for decisions involving great numbers of people and resources.

x	None; you're a typical grunt.
•	A low-ranking position of little authority, but a fair amount of (usually dull and unpleasant) responsibility.
••	A good post with most of the disagreeable duties pawned off on underlings.
•••	Mid-level rank, usually with ill-defined authority and responsibility (such leeway can be both a blessing and a curse).
••••	A position of some direction and privilege. You have access to large resources and are trusted by the elite.
•••••	You've reached the upper ranks; a leader in your own right. You hold significant power and respect.

Personality Traits

In rating *Willpower* and *Psi*, you define the indefinable. These two Traits are at the core of your character's being, and indicate who he is as much as his origin or Nature does.

Personality Traits differ from other Traits. Willpower and Psi each have *permanent* ratings, also called *scores*, that reflect your character's total strength in the Traits (noted by the circles on the character sheet). Whenever a roll is called for, the Dice Pool is always based on permanent score. Willpower and Psi also have *current* ratings, called *points*, that indicate your character's present reserves. "Spending points" refers to removing points from the current rating (noted by the squares on the character sheet). Current rating can fluctuate greatly during a story.

Willpower

Willpower measures drive and emotional stability. A high score reflects a confident, self-motivated individual, while a low score indicates someone with little confidence or perseverance.

•	Weak
••	Timid
•••	Hesitant
••••	Diffident
•••••	Certain
••••••	Confident
•••••• ••	Determined
•••••• •••	Secure
•••••• ••••	Iron-willed
•••••• •••••	Unshakable

Using Willpower

You spend Willpower when your character pushes himself beyond his normal limits in an attempt to do something extraordinary. You can spend only one Willpower point in a turn, unless otherwise stated.

- **Free success:** You can spend a Willpower point to earn an automatic success. This free success is separate from any that you roll, but counts toward your success in an action. You must declare that you're spending Willpower in this fashion prior to rolling for the action. Only psions may use Willpower in this way.
- **Resist instinctual response:** Sometimes the Storyteller may have your character react to something out of instinct — whether fear of an alien creature, revulsion at the sight of a gruesome corpse, or lust for a stunning individual. Your character can resist this urge with the expenditure of a Willpower point (although the urge may return depending on the circumstances, calling for further expenditures).
- **Resist Derangement:** When a Derangement causes your character to do something that he would rather not do, you may spend a Willpower point to resist. However, you must spend a point each time you try to overcome the Derangement. Such effort may eventually conquer the mental disorder permanently. This is only relevant if you've gained a Derangement; see **Mental Disorders**, page 257.
- **Resist psi powers:** Your character can resist the effects of some powers with the expenditure of a Willpower point, or upon a successful Willpower roll. The specifics depend on the power being used; refer to **Chapter Four: Aptitudes**, page 194, for details.

Compulsion

Once all of your Willpower points are gone, your character is subject to a *Compulsion*. His innermost Nature comes to the forefront of his personality, dictating his thoughts and actions. Compulsions are the weaknesses mentioned at the end of each Nature's description (see **Nature**, page 177). An Analyst becomes distracted even by the most mundane of puzzles. A Bravo acts without thinking, using brute force and bluster.

Acting at extremes can be very liberating, but it can also cause serious problems. While the likelihood of regaining Willpower increases (since your character behaves true to his Nature), operating under a Compulsion can make your character ignore important information, disregard otherwise obvious warnings or be manipulated easily. When at least one Willpower point is regained, your character shakes off the Compulsion, reasserting his self-will.

Recovering Willpower

Willpower points are regained whenever your character gets a chance to rest, or restores his self-confidence. The Storyteller is always the final arbiter of when and how Willpower is regained. The following methods are entirely

optional, and should encourage roleplaying. The Willpower gained should serve as a reward for playing your character well in the story — it should not be the goal itself.

- For simplicity's sake, one point may be recovered every morning upon awakening — a fresh start each morning, as it were. If nothing else, this point guarantees some Willpower. (This rule should be ignored during downtime.)
- If your character performs an action that affirms his Nature, he may regain between one and three Willpower points. The exact amount is up to the Storyteller. She may deny your request if she feels the logic behind it is flimsy, or if it appears that your character performs certain actions solely to regain Willpower.
- You may receive a point (or more) if your character achieves some special success, like rescuing his Mentor or discovering a significant plot point, or if your character affirms his capabilities in some way.
- You get points equal to your character's Willpower score at the end of a series (not a single game session). The Storyteller may modify this return somewhat if significant story elements remain unresolved.

Psi

Psi measures your character's attunement to the universe around him. All living things resonate with psionic energy. This energy is not separate and distinct from individual to individual, although each person's interaction with it is unique. Psi flows within and throughout all things, connecting and unifying energy and matter into a single sublime whole.

The Psi Trait indicates the strength of your character's connection to this energy and his ability to manipulate it, as well as his versatility and finesse in doing so. Psi also determines the number of dice rolled to use psionic powers.

Normal humans (non-latents), animals and the like each have only one dot of Psi, representing the basic connection that all living things have to this subquantum resonance. Such individuals cannot actively use their Psi point; they do not sense the greater union except in the most basic, instinctual sense. However, specific circumstances exist relating to Aptitudes and bioware that may require a player to expend his normal character's Psi point, or to make a roll based on the normal's Psi score. See **Chapter Four: Aptitudes**, page 194, and **Chapter Six: Technology**, page 258, for specifics.

A psion character must have at least 2 Psi. This is the basic level needed to perceive the flux of psionic energy. As your character's Psi increases, so too does his connection to this energy flow.

Attunement

Inherent to Psi is the capacity to sense strong sources of psionic energy as well as to perceive sudden, dramatic changes in the psi flow. This sense is called *Attunement*. Your character's level of Attunement is tied directly to his Psi score. As his score goes up,

the range and clarity of his psionic awareness increases.

The chart below indicates the range of your character's Attunement. The Sensing Range is a radius centered on your character, but doesn't require that he face in any particular direction.

Psi Score	Sensing Range
•	None
••	Five meters
•••	20 meters
••••	75 meters
•••••	750 meters
••••••	15 kilometers
•••••••	100 kilometers
••••••••	1,000 kilometers
•••••••••	50,000 kilometers
••••••••••	One million kilometers

Double the highest range for Attunement ratings reaching greater than 10 dots (due to bioware augmentation). So, two million kilometers at 11 dots, four million at 12 dots, etc.

When an intense psionic source (such as a powerful psion, a strong latent, a potent piece of bioware or an Aptitude effect) enters your character's sphere of sensitivity, roll Psi at +1 to difficulty. Success alerts your character to the nearby presence, but does not give any details about it. Each extra success gives him a clearer idea of the general proximity and power of the source. While this isn't an actual visual image, everything interacts with psionic energy in its own particular way.

Attunement is not a fine detail scan. Unless the psion is quite familiar with the aura flux he feels, even a great number of successes will relate only general information. Familiar auras (e.g., those of a close friend, teammate or aptitude) can be recognized with at least two extra successes.

Obviously, as a psion grows in power, the amount of psi flux he can sense on a regular basis increases greatly. Most Gifted tune out these perceptions so as to not be distracted constantly, unless they're actively sensing for psionic changes. Since psi energy is in constant flux, while Attunement can register a significant psi source, the sense cannot track it. The ebb and flow of energy make it impossible to lock onto and maintain such a focus. Specific psi powers may derive this effect, however (see **Chapter Four: Aptitudes**, page 194).

A psion cannot tune out a sudden or drastic change in the psi flow. A massive number of deaths or a sun going supernova sends out psionic "shock waves." The more in tune your character is with the subquantum universe, the more potent such ripples feel. A drastic change in the subquantum universe need not be an enormous event to have impact on your character; it can be personal, too. Energy changes due to the death of a close friend or to the birth of a sister's child can wash over or even overwhelm a psion.

When significant, inescapable events happen within range of your character's Attunement, roll Psi as a Bashing damage effect. Stamina soaks as normal. While you may not add armor to the soak, any psionic dampening devices that are active may provide protection. (See **Combat Systems**, starting on page 239, for specific systems on how to resolve damage effects.) Suffering damage from the shock waves of significant events indicate that your character is completely in tune with the universe's energy flux. Even if your character soaks the effect, he feels the pronounced impact nonetheless.

If you botch the Bashing damage roll, your character is overwhelmed by the psi impulses he feels. Each botch applies as an automatic Bashing Health Level of damage *and* reduces your character's permanent Psi on a botch-for-point basis. While Bashing damage heals as normal, it takes a full day to recover each Psi point lost.

It is difficult for psions to separate themselves from the psionic flow of the universe, especially as their psi powers increase. While a low Psi score makes a psion relatively insensitive to energy flow, it limits the amount of power that he may draw upon. Conversely, a high Psi score indicates an intuitive understanding of the implicate order and bestows a corresponding degree of power, but makes the psion vulnerable to the wild flux of the subquantum universe.

Using Psi

You use Psi points to activate and sustain your character's powers, as described below.

- Some psionic powers require energy to "activate." The amount of Psi needed depends on the power; see **Chapter Four: Aptitudes**, page 194, for specifics.
- Some powers' durations and ranges may be increased through the expenditure of Psi points (refer to the descriptions in **Aptitudes** for specifics). As long as your character succeeds in activating an appropriate power, you may apply Psi points to alter its parameters. Powers with fixed parameters cannot be adjusted by spending additional Psi.
- Your character may lose Psi points or even the ability to use powers on a botch (see **Mental Health**, page 256).

Recovering Psi

You may roll a number of dice each hour equal to the Psi points your character is currently down. Each success is a point regained (up to your character's Psi score). Rate of recovery may be increased through meditation (see **Psi Recovery**, page 237), bioware and other methods.

Botches on recovery rolls should be ignored. However, if the Storyteller is feeling particularly malicious, he may declare that each botch equals an hour before another recovery roll may be attempted (or even equals a number of Psi points lost).

Tolerance

Bioware needs to be sustained with psionic energy. Using biotech involves a symbiotic relationship; your character uses a device's various functions and it "feeds" on his psi energy. This exchange is not usually harmful, unless your character possesses more bioware than he can handle. The capacity to fuel bioware is called *Tolerance*.

Each piece of formatted bioware has a Tolerance rating listed as a number of dots. Unformatted bioware has a 1 Tolerance. Some devices may be used unformatted or formatted, in which case their Tolerance ratings change (see **Biotechnology**, page 258).

Your character may use as much biotech as desired, as long as the total Tolerance does not exceed his Psi score. A character with 5 Psi can carry five one-dot bioapps, one five-dot bioapp or any combination in between. It doesn't matter if the bioware is used constantly; a holstered biolaser still feeds on your character's ambient psi energy.

For Example: *Chei Leung has 4 Psi. His bioware consists of a formatted set of claws (2 Tolerance), an unformatted holefixer(1 Tolerance) and an unformatted biolaser pistol (1 Tolerance). Chei Leung's 4 Tolerance from the assorted bioware equals his 4 Psi.*

For each point of Tolerance in excess of your character's Psi score, one Psi point is lost and is not recovered until the excess bioware is removed (the bioware literally drains psionic energy). This amount is also subtracted from your Dice Pools when rolling to recover Psi points. The Tolerance drain kicks in when your character picks up the device to use it.

For Example: *Chei Leung's biolaser runs out of energy. His teammate, Linsey Marsden, has both a psychokinetic enhancer and a formatted biolaser carbine (being a Legionnaire, Marsden believes in being prepared). Marsden tosses Chei Leung the carbine (which defaults to an unformatted 1 Tolerance for Chei Leung). Since this puts Chei Leung at 5 Tolerance, one point higher than his Psi score, he loses a Psi point immediately. At least he can blaze away with the carbine.*

It might seem easy for your character to avoid exceeding his Psi score with Tolerance by simply taking off bioware. However, once Tolerance exceeds Psi score, the bioware relationship changes from symbiotic to parasitic. You must make a Willpower roll (at +1 difficulty for each point that Tolerance exceeds Psi) to remove each individual piece of biotech.

If you succeed on the Willpower roll, your character takes off a desired bioapp and recovers his lost Psi points as normal. If you fail the roll, your character simply can't give up the device. The parasitic resonance established between the character and the bioapp becomes so intense that the device actually considers itself a part of the psion's body, and he feels a similar "ownership" for the object. While your character may intellectually understand that the bioapp is harming him psionically, he can't bring himself to part with it. It's an irrational but undeniable feeling that your character must overcome.

Your character essentially undergoes a battle of wills with himself. You can make a Willpower roll each turn until you succeed or until you botch. On a botch, your character suffers Tolerance Overload, despite his current Tolerance total.

Tolerance Overload

If the total Tolerance of biotech possessed reaches 10, no matter what your character's Psi score is, he suffers a *Tolerance Overload* (see **Mental States**, page 256, for details).

For Example: *After the fight is over, Marsden asks for his carbine back. Since Chei Leung is over his Tolerance by one point, his player makes a Willpower roll at +1 difficulty to relinquish the biolaser. Chei Leung has a 6 Willpower, and his player rolls: 2, 4, 4, 5, 6 and 6; failure. Chei Leung holds the carbine tightly, refusing to return it to its rightful owner. Marsden, in no mood for games, insists that his gun be returned. Chei Leung's player rolls Willpower in the next turn, getting 1, 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6; not only failure, but two botches. Chei Leung is afflicted with Tolerance Overload.*

CHAPTER FOUR: APTITUDES

Each Aptitude is the expression of a particular psionic ability. There's much conjecture in noetic circles as to whether humans are limited genetically to a single Aptitude, or if there's some sort of control factor built in to the Prometheus Effect that restricts psions to one avenue of psi development. Whatever the circumstance, while it's not uncommon for one of the Gifted to manifest a marginal ability in any Aptitude, he can expand his psi capability in only one area — the specific Aptitude awakened by the Prometheus Effect.

While Aptitudes are separate and distinct from one another, the areas of development, or Modes, within an Aptitude are intertwined closely. Noetic science breaks down each Aptitude into three Modes. This division owes less to a distinction between the Modes themselves than it does to humanity's tendency to impose artificial structures on the natural order.

When the proxies first unlocked the secrets of psi, they developed specific applications of psionic power. Even now, almost two decades later, these "primary effects" are still the core training that each psion receives. A psion must understand the Aptitude's basic parameters before he may begin experimenting with new applications.

These primary effects may be developed independently of formalized training, but it's a difficult and exhausting process. Power manifestations other than those detailed here are also possible, but require the psion to engage in careful development and practice. The Storyteller should feel free to impose a base +1 difficulty and an extra one Psi point cost to all powers a character develops without adequate training from a more accomplished psion.

Rolling Psi Powers

As noted in **Chapter One: Systems**, all power rolls are based on your character's permanent Psi. That Psi score is also your Dice Pool when rolling psionic powers, unless stated otherwise. Similarly, all point expenditures in this section refer to Psi points. Alternatives, if any, are listed in specific power descriptions.

As a psion increases in overall power (signified by an increase in the number of dots a character possesses in his Aptitude), his individual powers may likewise increase in effect. Refer to specific power descriptions to determine if your character achieves increased capability when the number of dots in that overall Mode goes up.

Psi Prints

Noetic theory states that everything, from living beings to inanimate objects, resonates with psi energy to some degree. Psions tap into and manipulate this "subquantum energy" to create their incredible effects.

One of the more subtle ways in which one of the Gifted may use his powers is to attune to the aura that an individual leaves on something. This aura is essentially a "psionic fingerprint" with which a skilled psion can identify or contact a person.

A "psi print" impression isn't created immediately on contact, nor is it permanent. An object must be in someone's possession or presence for at least 6 hours for a psionic impression to be created. A psi imprint remains on an object one hour for every 6 hours that the individual had it in his possession (this can vary at the Storyteller's discretion; your wallet, which you have with you constantly, has a stronger imprint than does your coffee cup, which is nearby but not always in your hand).

Psi and Roleplaying

Both players and the Storyteller should remember that psionic energy — whether one calls it the implicate order, subquantum energy, the psi universe or some mystic "force" — is something that defies most labels and rules. This chapter endeavors to quantify psi's effects, but there is still much to be learned regarding psionic energy itself.

Humans have just barely tapped the smallest portion of this gift; its potential is almost beyond imagination. Psi bestows wondrous capabilities, and their effects are at once exhilarating and bizarre. A certain degree of respect is felt and caution is applied when psions manipulate psi energy.

Consider the powers described below as more than simply ranks of abilities. As a player, you should endeavor to describe the way in which you want to use a power so that it is not only effective but entertaining to the rest of the group. Does your character use Pyrokinesis, or does he fire a white-hot blast from his fingertips? Do you make a Clairsentience roll, or does your character open herself to the auras that ebb and flow around her?

The Storyteller should likewise be aware of powers' impact on the story, beyond their immediate effects. How do others react to seeing a flare of electricity erupt from an electrokinetic's hand? Or to a biokinetic who moves with blinding speed? Or to a telepath who answers a question before it's even asked?

By being aware of the descriptive and roleplaying potential possible with psi powers, you add yet another level to even the richest of stories.

After that duration, the signature fades rapidly. However, a psion attempting to sense a faded aura (for powers like Psionic Echo or Mindspeak) may still glean what remains of the psionic imprint a number of hours after it has faded equal to his Psi score.

For Example: *Chei Leung carries around his minicomp regularly for a week (so, 28 six-hour time blocks). Even after he forgets it in the back of a taxi, his psionic aura lingers on the computer for another 28 hours. A psion with 5 Psi can still pick up Chei Leung's psi imprint on the minicomp after 33 hours (base 28 plus five hours for the dots in Psi) — although if the cabby sold the device for some quick cash, tracking it down could be tricky....*

While psions tend to require physical contact to use psi prints effectively, gloves and other fairly thin materials aren't enough to block the impression. Heavier materials (a briefcase, vac-suit fabric, a bulkhead) disrupt the psion's ability to sense an aura clearly (the Storyteller should feel free to add a difficulty or two) — or even deny it entirely.

Effect Ranges

Those psi powers that do not require physical contact between psion and subject may be directed against any target within line of sight. There is a limit to the control a psion can exert with his effects, though. This depends more on the individual's inherent capability than on any limitations of psi energy itself (as far as noetic scientists can tell about the latter, there aren't many limits).

The range listed with each power's description is the distance your character can use that psi effect reliably. Any target still within line of sight beyond this range may be affected, but at an increased difficulty. The specific difficulty for this extreme range depends on the distance category involved. If the effect is listed in meters, extreme range is +1 difficulty per meter beyond normal range. If the power covers tens or hundreds of meters, extreme range is +1 difficulty per every extra 10 meters. Kilometers or greater measurements have no effective extreme range, since the psion can't see reliably past that distance anyway. These difficulties are in addition to any others already applied to the roll.

If a target is within a power's area of effect but not within line of sight, your character may still try to affect her. The Storyteller should apply at least a +3 difficulty unless your character has some reliable means of detecting the subject. So, viewing the target via a vidscreen or being accurately told her whereabouts might involve only a +1 or +2 difficulty. Ultimately, if the Storyteller feels that your character can't locate a subject reliably, then he can't use his powers on it.

Bear in mind that certain clairsentient and telepathic powers are designed specifically to find a subject outside of visual range. If your character does so and the target is within range of other effects, he may use those powers against the subject at only a +1 difficulty.

Aptitudes Table

This is a basic listing of the Aptitudes, their Modes and powers. Refer to the appropriate sections for detailed descriptions.

Biokinesis (page 197)

Basic Technique: Biosense

	Adaptation	Psychomorphing	Transmogrify
•	Metabolic Efficiency	Sense Biokinesis	Gross Manipulation
••	Oxygen Absorption	Bioshift	Molding
•••	Heightened Reflexes	Assimilation	Transformation
••••	Biosynch	Redundancy	Body Sculpt
•••••	Autonomic Shunt	Catabolysis	Homunculus

Clairsentience (page 202)

Basic Technique: The Sight

	Psychometry	Psychonavigation	Telesthesia
•	Psionic Echo	Orientation	Sense Mastery
••	Insight	Dowsing	Danger Sense
•••	Static Memory	Psi Cloak	Sensory Projection
••••	Flashback	Farsensing	Remote Sensing
•••••	Envision	Astrolocation	Psi Survey

Electrokinesis (page 208)

Basic Technique: Static Burst

	Electromanipulation	Photokinesis	Technokinesis
•	Stun	Control Illumination	Power Surge
••	Disruption	Spectrum Sight	Interface
•••	Static Shield	Electromagnetic Shield	Lockout
••••	Control	Laser Generation	Transmit
•••••	Feedback	Hologram Creation	Microwave Burst

Psychokinesis (page 214)

Basic Technique: Temperature Control

	Cryokinesis	Pyrokinesis	Telekinesis
•	Thermal Screen	Flame Immunity	Tow
••	Hypothermic Blast	Heatburn	Remote Manipulation
•••	Flash Freeze	Ignition	Force Barrier
••••	Heat Sink	Liquefy	Flight
•••••	Cryofreeze	Plasma Control	Slingshot

Telepathy (page 221)

Basic Technique: Mindscan

	Empathy	Mindshare	Psychbending
•	Sense Emotion	The Babel Effect	Willfinder
••	Exacerbate	Mindspeak	Will Control
•••	Emotional Achilles	Pilfer	Mindshield
••••	The Muse	Brainjack	Mindwarp
•••••	Mind Bomb	Network	Shagg's Folly

Vitakinesis (page 228)

Basic Technique: Kirlian Eye

	Iatrosis	Mentatis	Algesis
•	Mending	Mind's Eye	Inflame
••	Antitoxin	Passive Voice	Contusion
•••	Metamitosis	Ease Trauma	Algesic Shield
••••	Cellular Repair	Chemical Block	Lacerate
•••••	Regeneration	Knit Psyche	Morbidity

A psion automatically gains an Aptitude's Basic Technique as long as the psion has at least one dot in any one of the Modes. This applies to the Basic Technique of the psion's main Aptitude, as well as to the Basic Technique of any Aptitude in which an Auxiliary Mode is acquired.

Biokinesis

Biokinesis, also referred to as morphing or shifting, concerns the manipulations of the psion's own body and cellular structure. This Aptitude is the province of the mysterious Norça, and bestows utter mastery of one's physical form. Psions who practice this Aptitude may restructure their own bodies.

The other Aptitudes relate in some fashion to other people, places or things. Biokinesis, however, focuses on the psion himself (your character may use Biokinetic powers on himself only, and he may negate his self-modifications at any time with a successful Psi roll, unless stated otherwise). Incredibly skilled shifters have been known to inflict their "improvements" on the bodies of others in exceedingly rare instances.

Botching

Transforming one's physical form is a tricky process; even the most routine modification can cause the psion serious problems if handled poorly. The Storyteller should be imaginative and careful when determining the effects of a Biokinesis botch. A single botch might result in only misshapen limbs. Three botches may freeze the character in an intermediate state for a number of hours. Five botches could result in accidentally reconfiguring one's own "biological template" in some hideous fashion. Be careful about going overboard; make the effect suit the degree of botch.

Basic Technique

Biosense: Biokinesis instills a keen sense of biological awareness in its practitioners. The psion perceives instinctively the presence of nearby living beings, from plants to animals to humans to even bioware. By tracing the psi energy flux emanating from all living things, the Gifted may divine organisms' locations to within a few meters. A biokinetic could move through a crowd or a jungle even if blinded, using Biosense as a sort of "living radar."

System: Roll Psi. Success indicates that your character becomes aware of the presence, but not necessarily identity, of any living being within a radius of meters (centered on your character) equal to his Psi score. The subject's size affects the ease with which your character senses it. For example, a human is a standard Psi roll, while a cat is +1 difficulty and a jade plant is +3 difficulty. While the location is revealed, no other information may be discerned without actual physical investigation.

Biosense can be useful, but constant use can disrupt the game. The Storyteller should consider the drama of the plot. If a psion uses Biosense with each step he takes, the Storyteller should apply a difficulty modifier or Psi point cost, or even both.

Adaptation

Adaptation's strength lies in preserving the psion against hostile environments. Such environments are defined by the surroundings, not the circumstances, in which he finds himself. For example, crash-landing on a world with a methane-based atmosphere falls under Adaptation's protective province. Getting in a fight at a dive bar in Marrakech does not.

Adaptation is unique in that its effects are considered constant. Using these powers requires no conscious thought on the Norça's part; they are activated by his very survival urge. A truly suicidal psion might be able to deactivate Adaptation's protective powers, but otherwise the psion's body adjusts itself automatically to compensate for its surroundings.

• **Metabolic Efficiency:** Essentially a poison neutralizer, this power allows the psion to ignore the effects of poisons or toxins. His body processes these foreign influences automatically and removes them from the bloodstream with astounding efficiency. This means it is difficult to enjoy the effects of drugs (whether beneficial or otherwise) and alcohol; his body simply eliminates them as they are introduced.

Whenever this power activates, the offending substances are converted into neutral wastes immediately. A psion typically needs to urinate after this power has been active.

System: Your character is immune to drugs with toxin ratings equal to his Adaptation level and below (see the **Toxin Rating Chart**, page 229). No roll is necessary as the psion's body purges the foreign substances automatically. For any drugs or poisons with a toxin rating that exceeds the character's dots in Adaptation, his Adaptation score is used as his poison soak rating. This power can be dampened consciously one hour for each Psi point spent.

•• **Oxygen Absorption:** The psion's body adjusts itself to make use of any amount of oxygen available. At this level, the psion can breathe underwater, on hostile worlds, with a plastic bag over his head — anywhere, as long as his body can absorb even the slightest trace of oxygen. Since the shifter's body channels his oxygen intake much more efficiently than normal, his stamina is enhanced greatly as well. A psion with Oxygen Absorption may still be knocked out by a blow to the head, though he is not harmed by chloroform or poisonous gases.

System: As long as there is at least a trace amount of oxygen present, your character breathes normally; simply spend one Psi point for each hour that the psion's body must process its own oxygen. You may also add your character's Adaptation rating to Endurance tests that rely primarily on oxygen loss and muscle fatigue. Your character can suffocate eventually if there is a finite amount of oxygen (say, in a vacuum chamber), but he can still survive in such an environment for hours or days, depending on the area's size.

••• **Heightened Reflexes:** The psion's reactions are lightning-quick. To onlookers, the psion seems to know what is going to happen before it occurs.

System: Characters with this power have two options available to them. When the timing of actions is

measured in turns (combat, a timer is ticking away), your character may either automatically "go first" as if you had rolled the highest Initiative, *or* may take an extra action in his next turn (without splitting his Dice Pool). The second action occurs at half your character's Iniative. In either case, you must spend a Psi point for each turn that actions are hastened. At five dots in Adaptation, your character may both go first *and* take an extra action at the expenditure of one Psi point.

• • • • **Biosynch:** Short for "biosphere synchronization," this power enables the psion to modify his biology to exist comfortably in different physical environments. The psion can survive extreme pressures, gravity and temperatures, and even breathe toxic atmospheres for short periods of time.

System: Spend two points and roll Psi. Your character's biology changes reflexively, allowing him to endure an extreme biosphere shift for a number of hours equal to his Adaptation score plus one hour for each success rolled. Once this duration expires, another point expenditure and roll is needed. While your character can survive a sudden change (due to a hull breach in space, for example), he cannot survive in hostile environments indefinitely.

• • • • • **Autonomic Shunt:** The psion's control of his body is so complete that he is nearly indestructible. After suffering extensive damage, the shifter's body merely "shuts down," functioning at only the most basic level needed to survive. The psion doesn't remain active when his body has shut down. Severe injuries can be survived, but the character won't necessarily be the same afterward; the psion may endure the loss of a leg, but won't grow it back. Extreme head injuries may be healed physically, but may leave the psion brain dead. Decapitation kills regardless of this power's effects.

System: Your character has two additional, permanent "Bruised" Health Levels. Whenever he suffers enough damage to kill him, Autonomic Shunt puts his body into hibernation. Your character's body remains intact until it suffers an additional 15 Health Levels of damage (at which point all that's left is red paste...). These additional Health Levels must each be healed as Incapacitated. Your character remains comatose until he heals back to Wounded (see **Physical States**, page 250). He is ravenous upon regaining consciousness and must spend days doing nothing but replenishing the vital stores of fat and nutrients that he lost while "hibernating."

Psychomorphing

Psychomorphing explores the inner functions and modifications of the biokinetic's own physical body (and, in a few rare but notable cases, the capacity to affect another person's "biological template"). The psion may shift and adjust his body's biology to achieve any number of effects that are not visible to the naked eye.

• **Sense Biokinesis:** By invoking Sense Biokinesis, the psion can determine whether a given subject currently bears any biokinetic augmentation and whether

she has ever been manipulated by Biokinesis, and can determine the nature of those augmentations.

System: Roll Psi; each success yields knowledge of one biokinetic modification (current or past), if any, and its nature. This power works on only one subject at a time. At higher levels of Psychomorphing, however, your character may "scan" multiple subjects at one time. The total number of subjects he may inspect at once equals his Psychomorphing rating.

•• **Bioshift:** The Norça can adjust his physical frame and muscle tone. He can add muscle to generate greater physical power or to work more easily in a high-gravity environment. He can make his muscles and bones more limber and elastic to move about more easily or to perform in low-gravity environments with ease. This adjustment shifts the psion's own biomass to create the desired effect, although such changes are seldom apparent to the naked eye.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi; you may shift temporarily any number of dots in any of your character's Physical Attributes up to the successes rolled. The adjustment lasts 10 minutes for each dot in your character's Psi score. Once shifted, the Attribute dots remain in place until the power's effect wears off or when your character cancels it; he then returns to his normal physiological configuration. The adjustment may raise an Attribute above five dots.

If you get three successes on the Psi roll, you could move one dot from Dexterity and two dots from Stamina to raise your character's Strength by three dots, or you could move three from Dexterity and place two into Strength and one into Stamina — or any other combination you wish. Bear in mind that while one or two Physical Attributes may go up for a short time, at least one of your character's Physical statistics drops as well.

At 3 Psychomorphing, this effect lasts 30 minutes for each permanent Psi your character has. At 4 Psychomorphing, it lasts a number of hours equal to his Psi score. At five dots in Psychomorphing, the power lasts three hours for each dot in your character's Psi.

••• **Assimilation:** Psions using this power may safely introduce biotech directly into their own bodies. The bioware no longer requires any outside energy source; it draws its power from the shifter's body. The equipment literally becomes a part of its host. Flesh sculpts itself around the bioapp, and the device integrates seamlessly with organs and bones.

Though this power is useful, it's considered vulgar by many cultures (seeing a piece of bioware extending from someone's forehead can be very disturbing). It also gives rise to concerns regarding bioweapons and armor, since a clever Norça could hide any number of weapons inside his very body.

System: Spend one Psi point to introduce the bioware into your character's body (the Storyteller may require that large assimilations, such as armor and powersuit components, cost additional points). You must also roll Psi and get a number of successes equal to the bioapp's rating to assimilate the device completely. If fewer successes are rolled, the bioware sticks out in a rather unsightly and obvious fashion. Unless you roll at least one success more than the bioware's rating, some evidence of the device remains (a bulge, skin discoloration). Subsequent point expenditures and rolls may be applied to assimilate the bioapp fully.

Die rolls involving assimilated bioware use Psi plus the relevant Ability, instead of the normal "Attribute plus Ability" Skill Total. This reflects the symbiotic relationship your character develops with the bioapp. Firing an assimilated biogun involves [Psi + Firearms], while accessing a biocomp's functions is [Psi + Engineering].

Assimilation also helps your character manage his Tolerance. The Tolerance rating of any assimilated bioware is reduced by one for the purposes of determining your character's overall Tolerance load.

•••• **Redundancy:** The psion can stimulate his body to grow additional internal organs so that each individual organ is less important to the body as a whole. This means that the shifter can function normally even if maimed severely. Though he does not become any more difficult to kill, he still operates at peak efficiency when suffering from wounds.

Certain variations of this power have been recorded by noeticists. Some psions have developed the capacity to ignore pain rather than duplicate internal organs, though the effect is the same as for normal applications of this power. By shutting off their nerves selectively, these psions suffer no short-term effects from damage, yet still retain enough feeling to fire weapons accurately, sense where they are hit and otherwise react to their environments.

System: Spend two Psi points and roll so that your character may modify his body appropriately. The initial process takes five hours, although this time may be reduced an hour for each extra success on the Psi roll (to a minimum of one hour).

When your character takes damage, spend a Psi point for each Health Level he suffers. He isn't affected by any wound penalties until the end of the scene. Damage doesn't affect your character in any way — though he probably leaves a messy trail of gore if he's Crippled. Upon reaching Incapacitated, he collapses like anyone else. At that point, your character may take a number of Health Levels of damage equal to his Stamina rating before he dies (such "extra" Health Levels are each healed as Incapacitated; see **Recovery**, page 253). Upon healing from this "extra" damage, your character must use Redundancy again to restore his modified physiology.

••••• **Catabolysis:** The psion's biological mastery is so great that he may break the very bonds that connect a target's component molecules. Catabolysis may be used on any living thing, from animals to bioware to people. All that remains after using this destructive power is a puddle of gray sludge. This is universally devastating to all who suffer its vile effects.

Norça keeps this power secret, not only because of its effects, but because it is one of the few Biokinetic powers that can be used to affect others.

System: Spend three Psi points and a Willpower point, then roll Psi at +1 difficulty. Each success rolled equals one Health Level of Lethal damage inflicted on a target. Your character must touch the subject physically, interrupting its bio-organic aura.

This attack ignores hardtech armor. Biotech armor may soak the damage because it still has a vestigial psi aura (but is destroyed in the process). However, armor formed through use of psionic powers (such as Gross Manipulation) cannot soak. Since such psionically formed armor is simply a part of the subject's own organic nature, as it is destroyed the subject herself is injured.

The organic subject that suffers this damage is utterly annihilated, starting from the point of contact. Even if the target doesn't die from the attack (an unlikely prospect), the body parts turned to sludge can never be reformed — that part of the subject's "biological template" has been erased. All that's left is unstable gray ooze. It's been suggested that advanced vitakinetic techniques could restore a victim's lost template, but such an endeavor would be extremely difficult.

Transmogrify

This Mode involves manipulating cell structures for the purposes of altering the psion's cosmetic appearance. Some Gifted, enamored of this Mode's versatility, have changed themselves to such degrees that they may be confused for Aberrants. Such use of this power is one of the major reasons for public fear of and suspicion for the Norça.

• **Gross Manipulation:** This power allows the psion to make temporary adjustments to his physical form. Such changes aren't subtle, and are usually intended as quick offensive or defensive measures.

While most psions use this power to form their fingers into knives or to turn their skin into armor, it can also be used to adjust a psion's facial features or to modify his build. The psion cannot imitate another person's appearance, but merely disguise the details of his own. Anyone having even a passing familiarity with Biokinesis can readily identify when Gross Manipulation is used.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi. The effect lasts for a number of turns equal to your character's Psi score, plus one turn for each success rolled.

When this power is used offensively (e.g., to turn fingernails into talons or to make knuckles steel-hard), hand-to-hand attacks inflict Lethal damage. Roll Strength damage normally and add a die for every two successes achieved on the Psi roll (rounded up). A character with 3 Strength who gets two successes adds one die for a total of four dice of Lethal damage on hand-to-hand attacks.

When this power is used defensively (e.g., to harden skin), a point of armor is gained for every two successes on the Psi roll (rounded up). This armor can be used against both Bashing and Lethal damage effects, and does not reduce your character's Dexterity. A character with 2 Stamina who gets five successes adds three points for a 5 Bashing soak and a 3 Lethal soak.

When this power is used to alter appearance, anyone trying to identify your character visually suffers +1 difficulty to Awareness rolls for every two successes you get on the Psi roll (rounded up). Someone who tries to identify a character who received four successes does so at +2 difficulty.

•• **Molding:** The shifter can stretch and shape his body to extend his reach or to fit into narrow spaces. Norça use this effect to cross chasms or scale walls without need of climbing gear; they simply stretch themselves far enough to reach handholds. Psions have been known to flatten themselves to only a few centimeters' thickness to slither through narrow spaces.

System: Spend one Psi point and roll Psi. Each success equals a meter beyond normal length that your character may stretch his arms or legs (or his neck or torso). Your character's Strength and Dexterity aren't modified by this effect. However, the Storyteller may apply difficulties to Strength- and/or Dexterity-based rolls due to reduced leverage as your character's body stretches out of shape and biomass is distributed to compensate.

Alternately, the point expenditure and Psi roll enable your character to flatten his body to a uniform 5 cm thickness. In this form, your character can slither or undulate at no faster than walking speed, but can slip through narrow openings, roll into a ball or perform other visually disturbing but useful maneuvers.

Molding takes one turn to complete and lasts for a number of minutes equal to your character's Psi score. Further adjusting the length that a limb is stretched requires another successful Psi roll. Your character may revert to his original form at will (unless the duration of this power is exceeded, in which case he reverts automatically).

At 3 Transmogrify, your character may stretch multiple limbs at once, and Molding lasts 10 minutes for each dot of permanent Psi he has. At 4 Transmogrify, Molding changes last indefinitely, adjusting to your character's desires on successful Psi rolls (reverting to original form ends the effect).

••• **Transformation:** This power allows a psion to change his biological appearance in some significant cosmetic way. The shifter may make minor adjustments to his eye and hair color, fingerprints, height and build — even voice may be changed (by altering the voice box). These changes may be subtle, making him appear as a generic "someone else," or they may be combined to create a more radical modification, even to the point of allowing the Norça to impersonate someone. However, the psion may adjust himself only within the human paradigm; use of this power is limited to minor changes that don't radically affect the psion's basic "physiological template."

System: Spend one Psi point and roll Psi. The Storyteller may apply a difficulty modifier depending on the degree of adjustment: An unmodified roll could change

your character's eye color, while a +3 difficulty could be assigned for a complete change of racial type, making the psion indistinguishable from a "real" person of that race.

If this power is used to impersonate someone, you must also make a Style roll to determine the disguise's success (see **Disguise**, page 237). The psion does not gain that individual's capabilities (knowledge, speech patterns, combat skills). This physical duplication is only skin deep.

The adjustment itself takes a number of turns equal to the number of successes needed (due to any difficulty modifiers), but may be maintained indefinitely.

• • • • **Body Sculpt:** The psion can manipulate his body in obvious ways with this power. Flesh color may be changed radically, even creating patterns, or rainbow, leopard-spotted or camouflage color schemes. Considerable cosmetic modifications may be made by "molding" the skin in whatever shape the psion wishes. Additional organs and limbs may be formed. A biokinetic might give himself a set of functional wings or a tortoiselike shell of armor. He may add a prehensile tail or a swordlike spur of extended bone. Essentially, any modification that is not normal for human physiology may be created under the auspices of this power.

When Body Sculpt is used with Transformation, the shifter can shape himself into exceedingly bizarre forms. Tales abound of "angelic" and "demonic" psions shaping themselves in the images of biblical entities, and of more bizarre biokinetics "becoming" animals, mythic beasts and even stranger things.

Perhaps the most bizarre of all psionic powers, Body Sculpt converts psi energy into mass (and vice versa). It is therefore bound by the Laws of Thermodynamics, though the exact methods of this mass-energy exchange could require years of study to outline clearly. Still, the simple fact that it abides, however uniquely, by known physical laws gives noeticists some degree of comfort that the power isn't Aberrant related.

System: Spend two Psi points and roll Psi. The Storyteller may add difficulty modifiers depending on the degree of change attempted. Once complete, the adjustment lasts indefinitely. Each alteration must be performed separately (e.g., two separate attempts are needed to grow wings and to create a two-color mottled pattern across the flesh). Your character may make a number of changes equal to his permanent Psi.

Body modifications give your character new physical capabilities. Wings allow him to fly slowly; cat's-eye pupils bestow night vision; an extra pair of arms offers extra hands, but not enhanced strength. Body Sculpt requires a great deal of creativity on the part of player and Storyteller alike, since it involves diverse and bizarre biological changes.

• • • • • **Homunculus:** Psions advanced to this level may create miniature simulacrums of themselves. A Norça with this power is a one-person espionage team.

Each homunculus is distinct from the psion. While the shifter always knows the general condition of his simulacrum (through an extension of the Biosense technique, presumably), the psion cannot issue it "thought commands." The bond between a Gifted and his homunculus is very strong; while there are tales of "rogue" simulacrums, the Norça state that a homunculus stops at nothing to be rejoined with its "parent."

Homunculus works by literally converting a bit of the psion's own form into a miniature replica. This flesh and muscle separates from the psion's "biological template," giving rise to some danger if a homunculus is destroyed. Some biokinetics, having lost homunculi for various reasons, exhibit missing feet, hands and even whole limbs.

System: Spend three Psi and one Willpower, then roll Psi at +1 difficulty. Your character "loses" one Health Level's worth of flesh to sculpt the homunculus. The Health Level remains "lost" until your character subsumes the simulacrum back into his body. You must determine from where the homunculus is drawn (hand, foot, back). That portion of your character's body is lost until the homunculus returns, although Body Sculpt may be used to create a substitute limb in the interim. If the creation is destroyed, your character heals the Health Level as a point of Lethal damage, but the flesh is never regained.

The simulacrum acts just like a tiny version of your character, having the same tendencies and reactions as its "parent." You roleplay the homunculus, although the Storyteller may step in when she feels it's appropriate. Your character must communicate with his simulacrum just as he would with another person. When the creation is reabsorbed, your character assimilates the homunculus' experiences and knowledge.

Each homunculus is half a meter tall and weighs roughly 10 kg. It is a perfectly proportioned replica of its parent in virtually every way. A homunculus' Physical Attributes are all 1; Mental and Social Attributes are one less than its creator's (to a minimum of 0), as are any Mode ratings. Its Ability Traits equal its creator's, and Backgrounds may be used at the Storyteller's discretion. A simulacrum's Psi score is three less than its parent's (to a minimum of 1, at which rating Psi powers can still be used, but with only one die). Its Health Levels are Hurt (-1), Maimed (-2), Incapacitated (unconscious).

Clairsentience

The ability to extend the mind beyond the body to sense surroundings and distant places and their natures is the province of clairsentients, typically members of ISRA. The order is founded on pseudoreligious principles, though more in structure and direction than in any advocated philosophy. However, raw Clairsentience is not based on any of these precepts. The psion with this power is capable of reading his surroundings, from locating objects to the recent actions of other beings in an area and even to the limited ability to glimpse past and future.

The special awareness possessed by clairsentients makes them ideal investigators and scouts. Indeed, they have been fundamental to humanity's return to deep space after the disappearance of the teleporters. Their roles should not be restricted to planet scouting, though. Rare is the criminal, intruder, invader or spy who can evade a clairsentient, and these psions make ideal intelligence agents themselves.

Clairsentient powers are potent but often difficult to understand or interpret. The visions imparted by this Aptitude range from hazy to downright obscure. A successful Clairsentient effect reveals what a psion seeks to sense if it can be detected at all. However, his insight does not always come with an interpretation guide. The Storyteller should evoke these powers' intangible mysteries while at the same time providing the clairsentient with useful information.

Botching

The spatial and sensory relationships involved in clairsentience boggle the mind. Even when these powers are used effectively, the results can be hazy and unclear. Botching a clairsentient power can be as seemingly inconsequential as revealing erroneous information, or it can be a sanity-rending glimpse of things that defy the imagination.

Basic Technique

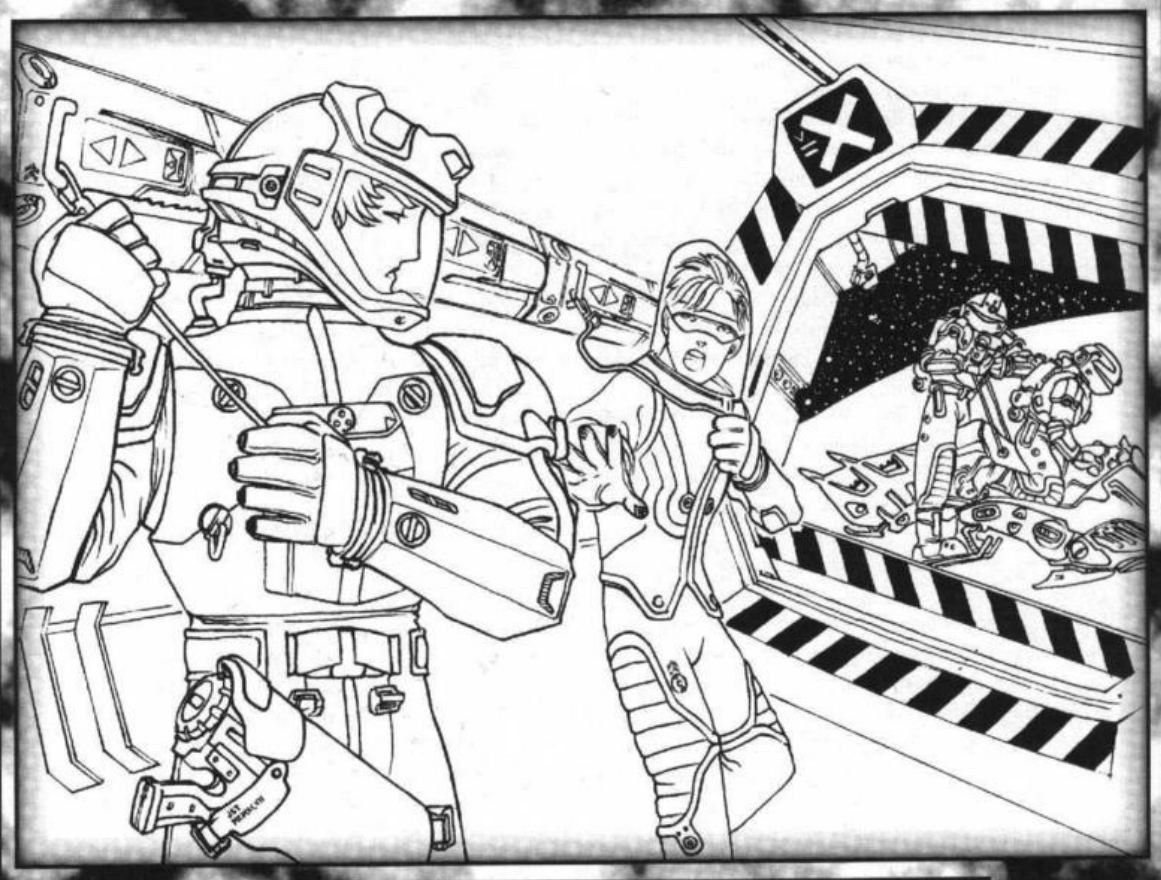
The Sight: A more refined manifestation of the basic Attunement that all psions possess, this technique enables the clairsentient to "see" the psi energy flowing through all things even more clearly. A psion can sense if an individual is a strong latent, gauge a fellow psion's strength, feel the magnitude of energy in an area or even detect an active power nearby.

This technique can also be used to perceive areas of strong Aberrant taint. Noetic scientists believe that the taint's resonance somehow conflicts with psi, creating a "blind spot" in the subquantum energy flow. Even so, sensing taint is difficult; detecting a half-dozen powerful Aberrants nearby may be relatively easy, but trying to sense an average-strength one at a distance can be quite challenging.

System: Your character's Attunement sensing range (see page 191) is increased by a number of dots equal to his highest-rated Mode. So if your character has 5 Psi and 4 Telesthesia, you add the four dots in Telesthesia to his five dots in Psi to determine his full sensing range. Characters exceeding a 10 sensing range add one million kilometers for each point beyond 10.

These additional points apply only to determine an increased sensing range; they do not reflect your character's overall Attunement to psi energy nor the amount of backlash he might take from psionic shock waves (such things are indicated purely by your character's Psi score).

Using the Sight to sense taint is no easy task (base +2 difficulty). The Storyteller should feel free to modify the



difficulty further depending on the distance, number and power of Aberrants (or area tainted) involved. Ultimately, the plot's drama takes top priority. If sensing a nearby Aberrant would ruin a carefully arranged story, then the Sight simply doesn't pick up the creature for some reason.

Psychometry

Noetic theory states that all things interrelate on a fundamental energy level (the implicate order or psi universe, as it's often called). Everything has an "aura," the living more so than inanimate objects, which indicates the subject's condition, recent uses or activities. Psychometry is the psionic ability to read these auras and glean information from them. These powers are invaluable to investigations and manhunts.

Psychometry provides the psion with insight into basic details (the conclusions he draws from that information are his own). Observations also focus on details that the psion looks for specifically; a clairsentient who senses a subject's recent activities knows that the person has been at home. The psion won't know how many trips the subject has made to the bathroom (unless those trips are somehow important to the psion or subject).

For each of the Psychometry powers described below, the psion may sense in the past up to a number of days equal to his Psi score.

• **Psionic Echo:** The clairsentient can touch an object or person and sense who or what has come in contact with it in the recent past. An abandoned biogun might register that it was handled by a missing psion. A murder suspect might register that she was recently in contact with the murder victim.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi. Your character must have strong contact with the subject; a brief touch or using the power a meter away from the subject imposes a +1 difficulty (and this modifier increases dramatically as the subject gets further away).

At low Psychometry levels, the psion merely gets an impression of strong basic contacts made by the subject. At three dots in Psychometry, he gets a general sense of the person or item's *physical* condition at the time contact was made with the subject. At five dots, a person's *mental* condition at the time of contact with the subject can be sensed. Thus, an abandoned biogun might register that it was handled recently by a missing psion, and that she was hurt badly (three dots) and unconscious (five dots) at the time.

•• **Insight:** This power can be used to sense where an object or person has been; the psion gets a psionic impression of the places a subject has visited. These places have some significance to either the subject or the psion, even if the subject was at the locales for a few minutes. The clairsentient might not be familiar with the areas detected,

but can still get a basic sense of them ("a large, dirty room," "a long, bright corridor"). If he ever visits these places, the psion recognizes their atmospheres immediately.

System: Spend a point of Psi and roll. Your character must touch the subject. While the Psi roll is necessary to sense the auras an object was exposed to, your character recognizes those auras immediately if he encounters them in person — or if he's already encountered them. A psion could know that a subject has been to the Moon or was in a specific building, or perhaps even in a room within a building if that room has a distinct atmosphere.

A clairsentient with three dots in Psychometry knows specifically when the subject was in a locale. At five dots, he has a general sense of what was going on at the locale (a festival, a fight, a conversation), which may suggest what the subject was doing at that place.

••• **Static Memory:** The clairsentient can sense recent activity in a designated area. Details are not conveyed, but a general idea of activity is. For example, a psion might sense that a fight occurred in a room, but not who was involved or if anyone was hurt.

System: Spend one point and roll your Psi score. The number of successes rolled indicate the clarity of information gained, say from recognizing that some kind of scuffle occurred (one success) to recognizing that a murder was committed (three successes).

The number of dots your character has in Psychometry determines the size of the area he can scan. Three dots indicate a room or small building, four a large ship or small region (less than a kilometer in radius) and five a larger region of space a few kilometers in area. No matter the size of the region scanned, the psion must be within it.

•••• **Flashback:** Objects or people can be used to actually see into the past. The psion witnesses past events, but only from the subject's perspective. Because this power conveys information exclusively from the subject's point of view, the psion cannot witness events that the subject was not exposed to. If the clairsentient touches a credit card, he might have a perspective of events around the card and whether it was used at any point. But if the card was dropped, it conveys information only from a position on the floor; events from such a perspective may be blurred or blocked entirely (conversations might be garbled or visuals distorted).

System: Spend two Psi points and roll Psi. Your character must touch the subject for Flashback to be effective. The number of successes on the roll indicates how many senses your character may use, or the clarity of information conveyed. One success might allow access to a subject's "eyesight," while three successes might enable the clairsentient to use all senses to observe past events.

••••• **Envision:** The clairsentient has a personal perspective on the past. By touching an individual or object or sensing in a location, the psion becomes a "noncorporeal" observer of events that occurred in or around the subject. Events unfold as if the clairsentient was there, regardless of what the subject experienced.

System: Spend three Psi points and roll. The successes gained on the Psi roll indicate the clarity of visions. One success may mean scenes are distorted or jumpy, while several successes may mean events are repeated from moment to moment for the psion as they occurred originally.

Each success also indicates the area over which events can be witnessed; one indicates a large room, three indicate an area the size of a large freighter and five indicate a few kilometers-area region of space. Repeated attempts to see further back or to see more events are possible (see **Second Chances**, page 162).

Psychonavigation

This Mode explores the ways in which psi is used to perceive the relationship between a clairsentient and a given object or destination. This Mode can be used to find something in the next room, the next ship or on another planet. Beyond simply relating how far away something is, Psychonavigation powers enable a psion to track someone across a city or to even plot a course through deep space.

• **Orientation:** The psion can establish his location with this power. Even if hopelessly lost in the Amazon or at a dead-end Lunar subcorridor, the psion can cast out his senses to perceive the nearest familiar landmark by which to navigate. While Orientation doesn't inform the psion that he's in the Mato Grosso, for example, it does relate that he's 500 km north-northwest of São Paulo.

The clairsentient with basic skill in Psychonavigation can only "spot-check" his location, focusing each time to get an update. A psion with greater capability can maintain Orientation as he travels.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi. The effect centers on your character, covering a radius equal to 50 times his Psi score in kilometers (8 Psi covers a 400 kilometer radius). The number of successes rolled indicates the scan's relative accuracy, from relating distance to the nearest known landmark with few successes to indicating multiple known landmarks as well as direction, distance, elevation and heading with several successes. So, "I'm somewhere to the north and within 500 kilometers of São Paulo" (one success), "I'm north-northwest 483 kilometers and moving away from São Paulo" (three successes), and "I'm north-northwest 483.625 kilometers and moving east at 900 kph, altitude 2,000 meters" (five successes).

At 3 Psychonavigation, your character's sensing radius increases to 100 times his Psi score in kilometers. Additionally, he can maintain Orientation for as long as he concentrates on sustaining it. All other actions are at +1 difficulty during this time, and a Willpower point may even be required to maintain the power

under chaotic conditions. At 5 Psychonavigation, your character's sensing radius is 250 times his Psi score in kilometers.

•• **Dowsing:** Since all things from human beings to inanimate objects resonate with psi energy to some degree, a clairsentient can use this power to try sensing the "signature" common to a specific kind of object or to a person. The psion can cast his senses in all directions in search of a particular kind of individual, other psions or ships bearing certain kinds of cargo. The psion must have encountered the specific type of subject for which he's sensing to use Dowsing effectively.

System: Spend one Psi point and make a roll. The power centers on your character, but covers an area equal to 50 times his Psi score in kilometers. The number of successes rolled determines the relayed information's accuracy, from "there are three psions to the east" (one success) to "there are two electrokinetics and a psychokinetic, all located at different sites, but I know where" (five successes).

Your character can maintain contact for the remainder of the scene. This requires no concentration on his part, but an Awareness roll is required to sense if current subjects leave or new ones enter the scanned area.

At four dots in Psychonavigation, your character's sensing radius increases to 100 times his Psi score in kilometers. With 5 Psychonavigation, your character's sensing radius covers 300 times his Psi score in kilometers.

••• **Psi Cloak:** Much of a clairsentient's sensing prowess comes from tapping into the psi energy that flows through all things — and sensing the relationship of other beings and objects to that subquantum layer of reality. The psion can cloak his own presence in this "psionic stream" with this power. Psi Cloak does not render the user physically invisible; instead, it enables the clairsentient to shield himself from forms of psionic detection, including from Attunement.

System: Spend one Psi point and roll. Each success on your Psi roll equals a difficulty applied to anyone trying to detect your character psionically (if you roll three successes, a character attempting Dowsing on your character does so at an automatic +3 difficulty).

The cloak at this level lasts a number of minutes equal to your character's Psi score, and he needn't concentrate to maintain it. At 4 Psychonavigation, the power endures 10 times his Psi score in minutes. At five dots in the Mode, Psi Cloak functions a number of hours equal to your character's Psi score. If your character has 4 Psychonavigation, 7 Psi and rolls three successes on Psi Cloak, anyone attempting to sense him psionically during the next 70 minutes does so at +3 difficulty.

Psi Cloak works not just against Psychonavigation powers such as Dowsing, but against any psi power that locates its target through a means other than normal sensory perception. Other Clairsentience and even Telepathy powers that tap into the psionic flow to connect with a target are hindered by Psi Cloak.

However, a clairsentient or telepath with an unobstructed view of a cloaked subject has more than enough sensory information beyond just accessing psi auras to lock onto the subject. Psi Cloak doesn't work against direct line of sight (this does not include video feeds, holoprojection and the like, though).

•••• **Farsensing:** The clairsentient with this power can extend his senses over vast distances, whether through the reaches of space or across a planet. This power is key to plotting courses and traveling through space without the aid of charts, or into space that simply hasn't been mapped. It's also used extensively to sense reliable routes of travel on a substellar scale (e.g., through orbital-station corridors or across mountain ranges). The psion projects his senses in all directions to detect objects, bodies, barriers and other potential threats. The clairsentient can sense both the safest and the most direct routes to a destination, and decide which is best for his purposes before setting out.

System: Spend two Psi points and roll; if successful, sensing is automatic (your character need not concentrate). Farsensing lasts for a number of days equal to your character's Psi score, and the range of detection is about one AU (the distance from the Earth to the sun) for each permanent Psi your character has. Obviously, Farsensing is more than powerful enough to scan for travel routes on a planetary surface.

This power does not allow a detailed investigation. A standard success on the Psi roll gives your character only a basic sense of the most obvious direction to take (not necessarily the fastest), and indicates major obstacles along the way. Each extra success provides a more refined course (effectively shortening travel time, but not always making the trip any safer) and more detail about any significant factors along the route (clear information on size, distance and heading of celestial bodies, for example). A detailed investigation of objects (such as for life signs, content, construction) beyond those factors already stated is not possible.

To sense any imminent encounters, spatial disturbances or nearby objects while Farsensing is active, you simply roll Awareness. This roll is made no matter what your character is involved in at the time (even if sleeping, he'll be startled awake by the vision). As a general rule, objects and bodies that move erratically, suggesting intelligence, are detected on two extra successes. You may make additional attempts if your character wants better results (see **Second Chances**, page 162).

••••• **Astrolocation:** This power allows a clairsentient to locate planets and other large stellar objects. Astrolocation doesn't allow for detailed identification of these objects, merely their general location and distance from the psion. To sense the object's details, Psi Survey is typically used. These two powers are often paired by explorers to first "cast out" into space for a stellar body, and then scan the object to confirm whether it's suitable for habitation, mining, research or the like.

System: Locating deep-space objects is extremely taxing. You must spend a minimum of three Psi points for the search, which are not regained until after the scan ends. Your character can perform no other actions while scanning, aside from basic needs of sustenance. Sleep can be attempted, but is fitful at best and requires spending an additional Psi point for each hour of rest.

A Psi roll is required, with each extra success halving the total search duration. The scan's basic duration depends on the size of the subject sought, the density of the solar system it is in and any known information that could narrow down the area to be scanned. Scans generally take from a few days to a few weeks.

Without biotech enhancement, Astrolocation can be used to detect planets, stars, large moons and other significant stellar bodies up to a number of light-years away equal to the character's Psi score. Small subjects like ships, moons, asteroids or space stations can be detected only if your character has six or more dots to use in Psychonavigation. Typically, biotech enhancers can artificially magnify your character's rating to increase the sensing distance and to enable him to detect small objects.

Telesthesia

This Mode allows the clairsentient to sense surrounding or distant people, objects and occurrences by extending his senses beyond the human norm. The psion can perceive things on a level outside that of normal consciousness.

• **Sense Mastery:** A clairsentient must be able to trust in all of his senses, or any one of them alone. This power allows the psion to move and maneuver with confidence when anyone else would be debilitated by blindness, deafness or loss of footing.

System: This ability is automatic upon attaining one dot of Telesthesia. No point expenditures or rolls are needed to activate the power; however, your character's Attunement to his surroundings grows as his Telesthesia rating increases. At one dot, all difficulties due to darkness, blinding light, deafening noise, utter silence, nonstandard gravity or slick surfaces are reduced by one. At three dots in Telesthesia, all difficulties for such conditions are halved (rounded down). At five dots, your character suffers no difficulty modifiers from these adverse conditions.

•• **Danger Sense:** Clairsentients' spatial awareness makes them alert to imminent physical danger, such as ambushes or structurally unsound areas. These dangers must be physical (feeling the subtle vibration of a weapon charging up, hearing the creak of weakened plasteel); psionic attacks cannot be foreseen.

System: Spending one Psi point attunes your character to his surroundings for that entire scene. During that time, a Psi roll may be made to sense any adverse situations (the Storyteller usually performs the roll to enhance the

mystery). The number of successes rolled indicates the detail to which the danger is perceived and understood (a standard success may only reveal some danger ahead, while with three successes your character may sense four individuals with weapons ready waiting just 'round the bend). Your character can sense threats up to his Psi score in meters distant.

At four dots in Telesthesia, your character gains a precognitive danger sense; threats can be anticipated some time in advance. The Storyteller rolls your character's Psi at the beginning of each episode. If the roll is successful, the Storyteller relates a vision of danger based on upcoming events, leaving it up to you how to interpret it (the number of extra successes indicates the vision's clarity).

This precognitive danger sense is not limited to physical threats; even psionic attacks can be anticipated to some degree. However, this precognitive power may not work to your character's greatest advantage, possibly revealing a relatively inconsequential event — he may have a vision of being run down by a vehicle in the same episode in which he fights Chromatics!

Bear in mind that time can be immutable; your character may be able to avoid an event by taking certain precautions, but "temporal linchpins" can force events to come about no matter what steps are taken.

••• **Sensory Projection:** The clairsentient is able to extend his awareness beyond normal human limits so that he can sense things at extreme ranges. Thus he can taste, "touch" or smell anything, even "look" into any nook or cranny or hear a whisper without physically investigating. Sensory Projection can also be used to come into "contact" with poisons or noxious gases without suffering their effects. This power extends beyond physical barriers, such as walls and bulkheads.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi. Your character's senses penetrate anywhere up to 10 times his Psi score in meters away from his current location, plus 10 meters for each extra success rolled (so 6 Psi with two extra successes rolled covers 80 meters). The effect persists for the remainder of the scene. This is not a full 360° sensing; your character must focus his senses in a particular direction.

At four dots in Telesthesia, your character's sense range increases to 30 times his Psi score in meters; at five dots, it jumps to 100 times his Psi score in meters.

•••• **Remote Sensing:** This power is often misconstrued as being part of the Psychometry Mode (not surprising, since all are merely different expressions of the same power — Clairsentience). However, Remote Sensing doesn't tap into the psionic resonance of past events. Instead, this power uses a psi print to connect the clairsentient's senses to a desired target, viewing events from a remote distance as they happen.

System: Spend two Psi and make a Psi roll to connect to the subject. As long as your character has a psi print for the desired target, he may maintain the remote sense connection up to 100 times his Psi score in kilometers from the subject.

Your character can maintain only one sense group at any one time — his own or the projected one. He can, however, switch that focus at will while the power functions, viewing through Remote Sensing for a few minutes, returning his focus to herself for a moment, and then going back to the projected senses. This power lasts for the entire scene, unless something causes your character's attention to be distracted significantly or if other psi effects disrupt the connection.

Projected senses provide information from the subject's point of view; your character sees whatever the subject is looking at, and hears whatever she hears. However, your character doesn't actually use the target's senses; he projects his own into that area.

Each additional dot in Telesthesia doubles the sensing range (so a character with 6 Psi and 5 Telesthesia can link with a subject up to 1,200 kilometers away).

••••• **Psi Survey:** A psion at this degree of power can study vast areas up to light-years away. Clairsentients often use this power in conjunction with Astrolocation to survey systems as a prelude to jump travel (with biotech to assist with the sensing, of course).

After a subject has been located with another power (often Farseeing or Astrolocation), Psi Survey can be used to study it in detail. The psion may sense for anything he desires, like a sun's speed of rotation, an asteroid's precious mineral content or even how much of a planet's surface is covered with plant life.

A high degree of detail isn't possible, such as determining the exact number of people on a continent or the specific percentage of nitrogen in an atmosphere. Nonetheless, the clairsentient can garner an incredible amount of raw data while still an immense distance from the target. Ultimately, though, if the psion doesn't have the background or knowledge to understand what he senses, the information gained means little to him.

System: The desired target must be located, usually with a Psychonavigation power (although visual contact is suitable as well — for the area in which your character is standing, for instance). Once the region is spotted, spend three Psi and make a Psi roll.

The number of successes rolled determines the detail of information gained. One success indicates whether a region is hospitable, three indicate the area's general conditions and five reveal more precise information (like ocean temperature, mineral content, terrain type). Repeated attempts can be made to get more information (see **Second Chances**, page 162).

Psi Survey may be attempted at a range of up to your character's Psi score in light-years. The area scanned covers roughly 3,000 kilometers in radius at one time. This area of focus may be moved around, but requires a Psi roll for each new area sensed. Your character can maintain a scan for three hours for each point of permanent Psi, but he may perform no other actions while sensing (aside from essential physical needs).

This power can also be used to sense conditions of smaller subjects, like space stations or individual

ships, but those subjects have to be located before they can be scanned.

Electrokinesis

This potent Aptitude, also referred to as "EK," encompasses the manipulation of the electromagnetic spectrum. Communications devices, vehicles, computers, even biotechnology — virtually all modern devices interact with this spectrum in some way. The human body is likewise subject to such influences. All of these things can be manipulated, augmented or destroyed at the whim of the accomplished electrokinetic.

Botching

Toying with the electromagnetic spectrum is not something to be attempted lightly. The subtle yet powerful energies that electrokinesis manipulates can turn on the user with frightening speed. Depending on the specific power attempted, the psion may give himself a violent shock, destroy a system he's trying to access or even inflict severe damage on himself (radiation burns, neural disruption). The Storyteller should be creative in determining the specific effects of an EK botch.

Basic Technique

Static Burst: This basic capability enables the psion to generate a small, unfocused electrical charge. The burst can be used to shock a person or even scramble a computer's operating system momentarily. This emission is only a precursor to the sophisticated manipulations that a trained electrokinetic learns, but it can be useful.

The Static Burst saw perhaps the single most profitable application when a low-level Orgotek employee used the technique to stick balloons to a wall. Having successfully entertained Alex Cassel's rambunctious nephew for a full afternoon, the clever employee was promoted to an upper-management position within the week.

System: Whatever the specific purpose to which the Static Burst is directed, the effect requires contact with the target and the expenditure of a Psi point. The effect has a subtle but visible effect.

The charge simply delivers a nasty shock. For every two points in your character's permanent Psi (rounded down), roll one die of Bashing damage (if he has a 5 Psi, you roll only two dice) and subtract for soak as normal. Even if the attack does no damage, the surprise is often enough to startle a target.

The burst can also be channeled into an electronic device (from a computer to a transmitter to a maglock) to disrupt its systems temporarily. Roll Psi with a difficulty equal to the target's fail-safe rating (if any). If the roll is successful, the device is scrambled momentarily, and is unable to function effectively for a number of turns equal to the extra successes rolled. This works only on a localized function; the burst is certainly not enough to disrupt an entire system.

Electromanipulation

This Mode explores the manipulation of electrical impulses within organic things. Animals, humans, bioware — any electrochemical-based system can be affected by Electromanipulation. This Mode allows for tremendous power over most living things, but its effect on alien life forms has yet to be explored fully. In theory, carbon-based life forms have some form of synaptic relay structure, using electrochemical impulses to transmit information and commands. As long as such a system exists, Electromanipulation can affect it.

This Mode's powers have a faint but distinct visible effect. Brief ripples of electricity flicker between the electrokinetic and the target at the point of contact when a power is first activated.

• **Stun:** Stun creates a bioelectrical surge in the target's nervous system. This power can be used against people, animals and even bioware. Stun doesn't actually cause injury, but is more than capable of overwhelming a target temporarily.

Since large bioware devices are typically composed of several small bioapps working in tandem, Stun affects only one of the bioapps, not the whole device. Successfully disrupting the organic laser on a bioVAS doesn't scramble the suit's biotech life-support system as well.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi in a resisted action against the target's Resistance (for bioware, use its fail-safe rating). If you get more successes, each extra one translates into a turn during which the subject is dazed (see **Maneuver Complications**, page 246). On a tie, the victim is at +1 difficulty to all tasks in her next action as she tries to resist the Stun's effects. If the target receives more successes, she shrugs off the attack.

Your character must touch the target at this level. At higher Electromanipulation ratings, Stun may be used at a range of up to your character's Mode rating in meters (so if your character has 3 Electromanipulation, he may use Stun against a subject up to three meters away). There is a visible effect as the charge arcs to the target.

Furthermore, at 3 Electromanipulation, your character can use Stun against a number of targets equal to his permanent Psi, simultaneously (as long as they're all within range). You still roll only once; however, each target's roll and the results are tallied separately.

•• **Disruption:** This power causes the target's existing bioelectric energy to fire at random, shorting out voluntary muscular control temporarily (involuntary systems like heartbeat and breathing are unaffected). While not usually strong enough to kill, the effect still hurts like hell.

System: Spend one Psi point and roll. The base Bashing damage effect inflicted on the target equals your character's Psi score plus any successes rolled; you may add a die for each additional Psi point spent. Disruption may be soaked as normal, although the effect bypasses armor. Regardless of whether the target takes any Health

Levels, she is at +1 difficulty on her next turn due to the extreme discomfort Disruption causes.

This power may be used at a range of up to five times your character's Psi rating in meters. At four dots in Electromanipulation, your character can use Disruption on a number of targets equal to his Psi score, simultaneously. The damage effect is rolled separately for each subject.

••• **Static Shield:** The electrokinetic generates a low-level field around his body by drawing upon ambient energy. This shield offers protection against those things that directly affect electrical and synaptic impulses. This power buffers the tek from Electromanipulation attacks, tasers and even from scanning devices directed at him.

System: Spend one Psi and roll. Each success rolled equals an additional dot you may add to your character's soak against attacks directed at his nervous system, most notably Electromanipulation powers and taser effects.

Additionally, when your character has Static Shield up, readings made on him with scanning devices (from retinal scanners to diagnostic sensors) are obscured. Any scans performed on your character are done at a difficulty equal to the successes you roll with Psi (so if you get three successes, a neural scan is performed at +3 difficulty).

Static Shield is subtle and looks like little more than a heat shimmer around your character (a successful Awareness roll at +2 difficulty reveals its presence). However, intrusions like a taser burst or a bioscan trigger a defensive response. In these cases, the shield flares in a crackling electrical web that radiates out from the point of contact.

The power lasts for a number of minutes equal to your character's Psi score. At 4 Electromanipulation, this time increases to 10 minutes per dot of Psi; at level 5 Static Shield endures 30 minutes for each permanent Psi point.

•••• **Control:** This formidable power enables the electrokinetic to take control of another organism, from a piece of bioware to a fellow human being. This effect requires a significant degree of finesse; the psion regulates voluntary nerve impulses, causing them to fire (or not) as he desires. The tek can enthrall virtually any organism that has basic synaptic relays — from subsuming command of a biolaser away from its formatted user to dominating the biolaser user's own body.

Most large or complex bioapps are composed of multiple pieces of bioware. Control allows command of the targeted portion, but not the entire system. Dominating a bioVAS' locomotive systems would enable an electrokinetic to make the suit run or stop — but he couldn't affect its weapon systems. Conversely, the psion could control the suit's laser, dictating when the weapon fires or adjusting its intensity. However, he couldn't force it to fire at a specific target since the bioVAS' arm is a separate component.

While an individual human might be of significant size, she is still a single organism, so an electrokinetic can seize a person completely. Sentient targets retain control of their mental faculties. While a subject may find her body forced to move to another's whim, her mind and involuntary functions aren't hampered in the least. She is fully aware of everything that happens to her, and if she has psi powers may use them to her best ability.

System: Spend two Psi and one Willpower. Roll Psi in a resisted action against the subject's Willpower score (for bioware, use the device's rating — if a device has more than one rating, use the highest). If the target rolls more successes, she resists the attack. On a tie, the victim is at +2 difficulty to her next action as she combats the power. If you get more successes, your character achieves a degree of control over the target.

How much control is gained depends on the number of successes rolled beyond your opponent's total, as detailed below. The Storyteller may call for additional successes if your character attempts to control a target with a radically different biology from his own (reflecting the difficulty of communicating commands properly).

Successes	Degree of control
One	Simple acts (jump, freeze, let go, fall)
Two	Complex actions (run, walk, roll)
Three	Elaborate, sustained maneuvers (drive, follow some one, attack a specific target)
Four	Extremely involved tasks (write a letter, hold a conversation)
Five	Severely complicated actions (choke herself unconscious, perform a musical number). This is the minimum number of extra successes needed to force a target to commit an obviously self-destructive act.

Your character doesn't need to speak his commands to the target; rather, they are directed with thought as a series of nerve impulses. Some skill in Medicine is recommended to exercise an advanced degree of control on a subject.

Your character is at +2 difficulty to all other actions while using Control due to the concentration required to maintain domination. Control is lost if the psion's concentration is disrupted significantly. This power may be used on a target at a range of up to 10 times your character's Psi score in meters. Control lasts for a number of turns equal to the number of extra successes rolled; this time may be increased by one turn for each extra Psi point spent.

At 5 Electromanipulation, your character can use Control against a number of targets equal to half his Psi score (rounded up). You just roll once; however, each target's roll and the results are tallied separately. Your character is at an additional +1 difficulty to all actions for

each subject dominated after the first. This penalty may be reduced by spending extra successes rolled that would otherwise allow for increasingly complex control, to "buy down" the difficulty rating (to a minimum +1 difficulty).

Any subject under Control, whether human, animal or bioware, counts as an additional point against your character's Tolerance (see **Tolerance**, page 193).

••••• **Feedback:** The electrokinetic who uses Feedback assaults a victim with bioelectric energy. The attack is a massive dose of electricity generated by the subject's own synaptic relays. This power can be used against humans, animals and bioware to equally devastating effect.

While other Electrokinesis effects are geared specifically to injure or incapacitate a target, and can even result in death, Feedback seems to involve a more intimate violation on the part of the attacker. Even though the psion doesn't create a mental link with the target, the connection to another human is disturbingly personal nonetheless.

System: Spend three Psi and one Willpower. Feedback may be used on a target at a range of up to 30 times your character's Psi score in meters, and requires a successful Psi roll to hit. Your character's Psi score equals the base Lethal damage inflicted on the target (each Psi point you spend adds another die to this amount).

Feedback is a Lethal effect, and it ignores armor. Only psi powers or bioware that directly protects the target's internal physiology (as Static Shield does) may provide a Lethal soak. If Feedback reduces a victim to Incapacitated, the Storyteller may decide if the target suffers permanent damage (see **Sources of Injury — Electrocution**, page 254).

When this power is applied against bioware, use the device's fail-safe rating (if any) as its soak. Each success rolled reduces the bioapp's score by one dot, permanently. Reducing that rating to zero destroys the device.

Photokinesis

Photokinesis (or photo-K) explores the vast potential of manipulating the high ranges of the electromagnetic spectrum. Vague reports on the Chromatics suggest that these aliens have developed this Mode to extremes that even Alex Cassel might envy. The possibilities inherent to photokinetic powers are staggering.

• **Control Illumination:** The capability to manipulate visible light is one of the most basic skills a psion can posses, and is usually the first thing that a new electrokinetic learns. This power may be used to adjust an area's light intensity or to create a focused beam.

System: Roll Psi; Control Illumination lasts a number of turns equal to your character's Psi score. Each extra success rolled increases this duration by another turn.

Your character can enhance or dim an area's ambient illumination. With standard lighting, increasing illumination generates an irritating glare, while dimming it creates a murky twilight (+1 difficulty to visual-based actions in either case). In dark areas, an increase makes for normal viewing, while a reduction plunges the place into pitch darkness (see **Maneuver Complications — Blinding**, page 246). Bright areas can be made blindingly so or dimmed to a comfortable level. Your character gains no special immunity to illumination changes (although Spectrum Sight could bypass the effects). This effect covers a radius area equal to your character's Psi rating in meters, and increases by five meters for each dot in his photo-K rating (3 Photokinesis adds 15 meters to the radius).

Alternately, your character can manipulate light waves to create a focused ray as powerful as any halogen beam. The beam may be a pinpoint or a cone (with a projecting base 10 centimeters across), and may be adjusted between the two. The light may emit from anything within your character's range of effect, but it must emanate from a specific object — whether the palm of a hand, a weapon sight or a rock. The range of this light is five meters for each point of Psi possessed. This range increases by five meters for each dot in Photokinesis (4 Photokinesis adds 20 meters to the projection range).

At one or two dots in Photokinesis, light projected from an object cannot be "removed" from the item to be cast from another object. However, if the object is portable, it can be moved around and used as a "flashlight." At 3 Photokinesis, your character may move sources of illumination around within his range.

•• **Spectrum Sight:** This power focuses on perceiving electromagnetic energy waves from infra-red through to the high end of the spectrum. While this power doesn't enable the tek to actually tap into these wavelengths, it does allow for accurate detection of heat traces, hologram projection sources and possibly even harmful gamma radiation. Tuning to certain ranges (infra-red or ultraviolet, most notably) can help the psion see in otherwise adverse conditions.

Theoretically, Spectrum Sight allows a psion to detect a cloaking field generated by bending light waves. While this power does not allow the electrokinetic to see through the field, the cloak's light-wave manipulation would be distinct. Of course, this possibility remains strictly theoretical until the Chromatics are encountered again.

System: Spend one Psi and make a roll. Since the air is flooded with electromagnetic waves of varying intensities, simply "looking" at the spectrum as a whole reveals a jumbled mess. Your character must "tune" his senses to a particular wavelength (whether infra-red, X-ray, cosmic or some other type) to detect activity there. Understanding wave energy is important; some skill in Science is recommended to exercise an advanced degree of control with this power.

A standard success reveals any wavelengths within the scanned range; each extra success gives an increasing level of detail (specific frequency, intensity, point of origin). Different wavelengths may be scanned; simply roll Psi each time a new wavelength type is sensed (choosing from infra-red, visible light, ultraviolet, X-ray, gamma and cosmic waves). Your character can perceive energy waves at a range of up to 10 times his Psi score in meters (and even through barriers, although scanning clarity suffers).

Spectrum Sight lasts for the scene, but demands your character's concentration while it is active (+1 difficulty to other actions while sensing). The power may be deactivated at any time desired. At 4 Photokinesis, your character doesn't have to focus fully on the sensing, negating that difficulty modifier.

••• **Electromagnetic Shield:** This effect harnesses ambient energy waves in a field around the psion, protecting him against anything from ambient gamma radiation to focused laser bolts.

The shield acts as a buffer against these electromagnetic-wave effects, absorbing attacks at the point of impact and dispersing them harmlessly across the field's entire surface. In the case of ambient waves, the electrokinetic appears to have a scintillating aura about him. When struck by focused energy, the shield flares for an instant as it absorbs and diffuses the beam. The shield also disrupts holographic integrity if the two intersect directly.

Despite its obvious usefulness against energy, the Electromagnetic Shield offers no protection against gases, toxins, vacuum or physical attacks. Nor does it offer protection against electrical energy, as the two types emit in different fashions.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi. Due to the vast range involved within the electromagnetic spectrum, you must designate the frequency to which the shield is attuned (from radio, microwave, infra-red, visible light, ultraviolet, X-ray, gamma or cosmic waves). Each success on the Psi roll equals an additional dot of soak against attacks in that frequency. This range may be adjusted at any time, simply requiring another Psi roll to attune it to the new frequency (only the initial roll's successes are counted for purposes of additional soak).

Instead of focusing directly along a specific range, you may choose to oscillate the EM Shield across the entire spectrum. This application gives no defense against direct attacks, but protects your character against the effects of ambient soft or hard radiation (see **Sources of Injury — Radiation**, page 255). It also disrupts radio communications, radar and IR contact with your character (+1 difficulty to rolls involving such devices for each success you get on the Psi roll).

At level three, the shield lasts for a number of turns

equal to your character's Psi score. At 4 Photokinesis, the shield lasts for a number of minutes equal to her Psi score. At five dots in this Mode, your character may extend the field to cover a radius area equal to his Psi score in meters.

•••• **Laser Generation:** This potent capability allows the accomplished psion to emit focused laser energy. The electrokinetic draws in and channels ambient energy, firing it out in the desired direction. While most psions don't have the same "energy reserves" as a laser pistol does, many feel that the versatility of being a walking weapon more than makes up for this shortcoming.

System: Spend two Psi points. Your character can generate a beam that inflicts a Lethal damage effect equal to his Psi score. The laser may be fired 30 meters for every permanent Psi point.

The beam is actually fired using [Psi + Firearms]. The psion need not emit the beam from a specific body part (such as fingertips or eyes), although doing so helps with aiming (+1 difficulty if not "pointed" like a conventional weapon). The effect at this level is just like a standard laser beam.

At 5 Photokinesis, your character need not "point," instead simply firing in whatever direction he wills (although he still must see his target). Range increases to 50 meters per Psi as well. Further, your character may perform any laser ranged combat maneuvers by spending an additional Psi point per shot (see **Ranged Combat Maneuvers**, page 245).

••••• **Hologram Creation:** As this power's name states, the psion can create holographic images. Although these images are fashioned using the same type of low-level visible laser energy as used with technologically created holograms, photokinetically generated images have no conventional power source. Additionally, intersecting lasers that create images are pinpoints of focused light that originate from the air spontaneously. They are not beams that can be traced to a point of origin. This allows the tek a greater degree of versatility in generating a hologram than can be achieved with tech projection.

System: Spend two Psi and roll; the image your character can make depends on the number of successes rolled (see below). The hologram lasts for a number of minutes equal to your character's permanent Psi, and may be projected at a range of up to 10 times your character's Psi score in meters.

Bear in mind that these holograms are handled in just the same way as those created through technology — holograms have no actual physical substance and fall under strict international laws regarding projection of fully realistic (opaque) images. Also, these holograms don't generate sound; Transmit could be used in tandem to create full audio-visual images.

Successes	Image
One	Single translucent, static image up to a half-meter in radius.
Two	Single translucent, dynamic image up to one meter in radius.
Three	Single opaque, dynamic image up to one meter in radius, or a translucent one up to three meters in radius.
Four	Single opaque, dynamic image up to two meters in radius, or as many as three translucent ones up to three meters in radius each.
Five	Two opaque, dynamic images up to two meters in radius each, or as many as 10 translucent ones up to five meters in radius each.

Hologram Creation requires extreme concentration. Your character performs other actions at +2 difficulty and may move no faster than a slow walk while maintaining a hologram. Further, the image can lose integrity and even disperse if your character is distracted. Being started, engaged in intense dialogue or injured requires a Willpower roll to maintain focus (the Storyteller may apply a difficulty if she feels the cause is sufficient).

Technokinesis

Technokinesis deals with the energy flow within inorganic technology, from raw power to subtle information transmission (the Mode essentially involves manipulating the low end of the electromagnetic spectrum). Producers of conventional technology routinely include fail-safe devices in their wares to prevent electronic (or psionic) tampering, but it seldom takes long for a clever tek to bypass these measures.

• **Power Surge:** The electrokinetic can short out critical systems in a hard-tech device and render it useless by applying electrical surges and magnetic bursts.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi against a difficulty equal to the target device's fail-safe rating (if any). Each success rolled is a dot subtracted permanently from the device's system. If the total number of dots subtracted is greater than the dots the device has, the gear's systems are destroyed completely.

This damage may be repaired if an appropriate Engineering roll achieves a number of extra successes equal to those achieved on the Psi roll. Fewer successes may still allow for partial reconstruction, at the Storyteller's discretion.

•• **Interface:** The psion may interface with a security system, hovercar, computer, SI network or even a vending machine — in short, any device equipped with an electronic operating system. The tek connects psionically with the equipment, inputting commands with the very power of his mind.

This power gives many people pause, as a skilled EK could conceivably command even the most securely maglocked door to open or the most formidably defended computer system to divulge its secrets. Despite the fact that Orgotek psions abide by that company's published regulations, a number of governments have legislation pending to establish greater control over this power's use.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi in a resisted action against the target device's fail-safe rating. If the target doesn't have a fail-safe rating, it's simply a standard action. Your character must actually touch the device in question (on an on/off switch, power cord or even on a carrying handle is sufficient). Accessing a device from a distance requires Transmit (see next page) or a similar effect.

A character with two dots in Technokinesis can make only simple commands (on, off, open, close). This is more than enough to override even a security-locked door, but severely limits searching through a minicomp file directory.

With 3 Technokinesis, your character can transmit more complex commands. He interacts with the device like any other authorized user would (including having to deal with internal protocols, fail-safes and the like). However, once inside the system, use [Psi + Engineering] (instead of the normal [Intelligence + Engineering]) for any commands or tasks requiring a skill roll. Reprogramming isn't possible, but bypassing or otherwise tricking a system may be attempted.

At 4 Technokinesis, an electronic device's programming may be changed (to the extent that the system's memory and operation allow). As long as the device can actually perform a desired function, your character may reprogram it appropriately — setting a weapon to self-destruct, changing a satellite's orbit or even reprogramming an SI. Once in the system, programming rolls are made with [Psi + Engineering]; the Storyteller may apply difficulty modifiers for especially involved changes, or if the device itself is particularly complex.

Upon reaching five dots in Technokinesis, your character can access a number of devices equal to his Psi score (and that may be touched or otherwise contacted appropriately) at one time. Manipulation of multiple devices allows for complex commands to be given, but none of the devices can be reprogrammed.

At two dots, Interface lasts a number of minutes equal to your character's Psi score, plus one minute for each extra success on the initial Psi roll. At 4 Technokinesis, it lasts five minutes for each permanent Psi and extra success. When the power's duration is almost lapsed, you can extend it by spending another Psi point and rolling again. This roll is handled as the initial one was, although the opposing fail-safe roll involves one *less* die with each "re-link" (this simulates that your character becomes more attuned to the device and can avoid its security measures more easily). Once the duration ends or you fail a Psi roll, your character is booted out of the system.

In the electronically paranoid 22nd century, fail-safe systems run on a continuous monitoring cycle, re-

quiring an Engineering roll every five turns to avoid detection (see **Fail-safes**, page 270). Some skill in Science is recommended to exercise a greater degree of control with this power.

••• **Lockout:** Electrokinetics have found that technological fail-safes aren't always sufficient to protect devices, and developed this effect to create a "psionic fail-safe" around a targeted device. Essentially, the psion "weaves" the device's ambient electromagnetic energy into a complex interference pattern that resists even the most inspired hackers and electrokinetic assault.

System: Spend one Psi point and make a roll. Each success on the Psi roll equals a fail-safe level that the device has against other intrusion (if the device already has a fail-safe rating, the new levels are simply added on). Some skill in Engineering is recommended to understand a device's operating systems.

Lockout lasts a number of hours equal to your character's Psi score; this may be increased by an hour for each additional Psi point spent. At 4 Technokinesis, the duration is a day per point. At level five in this Mode, duration extends to a week per point.

•••• **Transmit:** This power focuses on sensing and transmitting signals along the lower "half" of the electromagnetic spectrum, from radio to microwave to even infra-red frequencies — all without need of actual receivers or transmitters.

System: Spend two points and roll Psi; your character can monitor or send transmissions a distance of up to 10 times his Psi score in kilometers (at 5 Technokinesis, this increases to 50 times). This range applies to a clear, directed transmission; your character's "internal transmitter" is too weak to be effective any further than that.

While scanning frequencies or transmitting a message is a standard action, creating a scrambled message or trying to jam someone else's transmission involves a +1 difficulty. The Storyteller may modify difficulties depending on the variables involved (see **Transmissions**, page 274, for more details).

Skill in Science is recommended to fully control signals being projected. Transmit may be used for the remainder of the scene.

••••• **Microwave Burst:** Though this power is not taught in official training sessions, most technokinetic specialists who see active duty make it a point to learn this effect. The psion duplicates a microwave transmission and focuses an intense energy discharge at his desired target. Victims with any degree of moisture within them (as all living beings have) literally boil from the inside. If taken to extremes, Microwave Burst can have particularly gruesome results.

System: Spend three Psi and one Willpower. The effect may be directed at a target within 30 meters for each dot in your character's Psi score, and requires a Psi roll to hit. The Lethal damage effect inflicted on the target equals your character's permanent Psi (you may add another die to this total for each Psi point spent). Microwave Burst ignores armor. Only psi powers (such as EM Shield) or bioware that defend against such wave transmissions may provide a Lethal soak.

If a Microwave Burst reduces the target to Incapacitated, the Storyteller may decide that the target suffers permanent damage (see **Sources of Injury — Radiation**, page 255).

Psychokinesis

Psychokinesis (or "PK") is perhaps the most visceral of the psionic Aptitudes. Rather than being especially attuned to a certain aspect of the physical world such as, say, biology, psychokinetics affect the physical world in the most blatant of ways. A psychokinetic doesn't bother to explore the delicate chemical bonds in an enemy's nervous system; he just makes her *move* — preferably out an airlock. Living or unliving, organic or inorganic — it's all the same. Subtlety is possible with psychokinesis; it just isn't necessary.

Psychokinesis demonstrates better than any of the Aptitudes how closely entwined yet subtly distinct an Aptitude's Modes are. Cryokinesis, Pyrokinesis and Telekinesis are no more than slightly different ways to manipulate molecules — Cryo slows them down, Pyro speeds them up and Teke moves them around. Each method involves a slightly different application of psi energy. However, most psions with this Aptitude tend to develop a personal preference for one Mode and explore its potential more than they do the other two.

Botching

The primary danger in using Psychokinesis is mishandling an object's molecular structure. It's not unknown for an overeager psion who tries to freeze something to push too hard and end up boiling it instead. The Storyteller may even want to get creative and have a PK botch involve an effect from a Mode other than the one the psion is using.

Basic Technique

Temperature Control: It's hard for a psychokinetic to resist exerting his power even slightly over his surroundings. The psion adjusts the temperature of his surroundings almost reflexively to a range that he finds comfortable or that reflects his current mood. This technique is harmless to all but the most sensitive devices, but anyone near the psychokinetic will certainly feel the temperature change.

System: Roll Psi; your character can raise or lower the temperature in a small area (roughly a three-meter radius centered on him) by up to 15 °C. The adjusted temperature drops off rapidly beyond the effect's radius until it equals the ambient temperature. The change lasts as long as your character concentrates (+1 diffi-

culty to other actions while maintaining this effect), and temperature returns to normal 10 minutes afterward.

Each extra success rolled can either add one degree Celcius to the temperature variation or extend the duration for one minute beyond the time of concentration.

Cryokinesis

The universe may not be an orderly place, but that can always be changed. That's the philosophy behind Cryokinesis: imposing order on overactive molecules, slowing their motion, cooling the objects they comprise. A potent cryokinetic can lower the temperature of almost any object, even a person; either pleasantly cooling his subject — or freezing it solid.

• **Thermal Screen:** The first thing any self-respecting Legionnaire learns is how to protect himself. By drawing in ambient heat, the psion can shield himself from the worst effects of exposure, cold damage or even from cryokinetic attacks. This effect can make the psion's immediate surroundings even colder as the psychokinetic absorbs more and more heat energy.

System: Spend a Psi point and roll; each success adds one point to your character's soak against both Bashing and Lethal cold effects. The screen lasts for the rest of the scene. At 4 Cryokinesis, the Thermal Screen may be extended around your character a number of meters in radius equal to half his Psi score (rounded up).

While this power is in effect, your character's infra-red register increases drastically since he's gathering heat around himself (anyone with IR-sensing equipment who monitors your character's position gets one automatic success to pick up his signature).

•• **Hypothermic Blast:** The psion focuses a quick blast of supercooled air at a target. The sudden freezing effect visibly frosts the air between psion and subject, and can slow the target's metabolism or even cause frostbite.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi in a resisted action against the target's Endurance. Every extra success you roll translates into one Bashing Health Level applied to the victim (this damage bypasses soak). Additionally, every two extra successes put the target at +1 difficulty to all actions for the next three turns as her limbs become numb.

If the target has Thermal Screen up, she may add its rating to her Endurance total for the resisted roll.

Your character may affect a target at a range of up to 10 times his Psi rating in meters. Upon reaching four dots in Cryokinesis, your character may affect a number of targets equal to his Psi score, simultaneously (if they're within range). Each target's roll and the results are resolved individually against your single roll.

••• **Flash Freeze:** The psion slows the motion of free liquids, freezing them to solids in the space of seconds. This effect can be used on such high-temperature liquids as boiling water or molten metal, although the higher the substance's current temperature the more challenging this becomes. Flash Freeze is not effective against living beings or other complex organisms.

This power may also be used for less direct effects, such as condensing and freezing surrounding water vapor (a psion could fill his drink with ice and dehumidify the room at the same time).

System: Spend one Psi point and roll. The number of extra successes required to freeze a target depends on the substance and its current temperature. The chart below indicates the number of successes needed to freeze a substance with an ambient temperature between 10 °C and 40 °C. The target remains frozen until it thaws naturally back to ambient temperature (for particularly large or dense substances, this could take hours).

Successes Needed	Substance
One	Water
Two	Alcohol
Three	Oil
Four	Liquid Nitrogen
Five	Mercury

A greater number of successes may be required for significantly hotter substances. Generally, the Storyteller may require an extra success for every additional 40 °C that a substance is above 40 °C. If you don't roll the full number of successes required, your character can still reduce the substance's temperature by an amount that the Storyteller feels is suitable.

A surface or object affected by this power suffers the effects of a drastically reduced temperature, from frosted- or iced-over surface to brittleness to possibly permanent structural damage. Specifics are up to the Storyteller.

Your character can affect a substance that is up to his Psi score in meters radius at a range of up to five times this Mode's rating in meters (at 3 Cryokinesis, he can Flash Freeze a substance up to 15 meters away). At 4 Cryokinesis, he may freeze a number of separate substances equal to his Psi score, simultaneously.

•••• **Heat Sink:** The psychokinetic can extinguish open fires with a glance. He psionically halts the fire's molecular motion, cooling even a red-hot ember. A skilled psion can snuff a bonfire in an instant. Not even warm ash remains.

System: Spend two points and roll Psi. Your character can reduce a fire's intensity by an amount equal to his Psi score plus one for each success you roll (see **Sources of Injury — Fire**, page 255, and consider each type of fire's damage effect to be its intensity). The area doused covers a number of meters in radius equal to this same total.

If the fire isn't put out completely with the first effort, its intensity is at least reduced by the amount rolled for two turns. After that point, the surrounding heat excites the fire back to its former intensity —

unless the blaze is extinguished in the meantime, of course.

Heat Sink is a reactive effect. Your character cannot use it to snuff an explosion before it goes off; even trying to "bleed off" the tremendous heat as an explosion occurs would be very tricky (the Storyteller should impose a +2 difficulty on any attempt to douse an explosion in the same turn in which it erupts).

••••• **Cryofreeze:** This effect is comparable to that of a liquid nitrogen bath. The psion can freeze flesh or blood as well as wood, plastic or metal into a brittle, supercold state. This power inflicts severe frostbite or hypothermia in seconds when used on living beings. Not even heavily bundled targets are immune — the effect simply ignores any layers of clothing and focuses on the person within.

System: Spend three Psi points and make a resisted Psi roll against the target's Endurance. As long as you score more successes, the subject takes a number of Lethal Health Levels equal to your character's Psi, plus one for every extra success achieved on your roll. Armor *cannot* be used to soak — only applicable psi powers currently active (like Thermal Screen) apply. Cryofreeze may be used against targets at a range of up to 30 times your character's Psi rating in meters.

Cryofreeze imposes an immediate frozen state by lowering the subject's core temperature, so permanent damage is likely. If the target loses more than three Health Levels at once, she stands a good chance of losing fingers, toes, ears or other extremities due to frostbite (this can translate to reduced Attributes or Abilities, at the Storyteller's discretion).

A target reduced to Incapacitated or Dead by Cryofreeze can literally be shattered with a sharp blow — even if left whole, medical science can do little to save her.

Temperature Ranges

Substances have different freezing and boiling points depending on their molecular compositions, current atmospheric pressure and other variables. Since detailing the specifics of this would be pretty dry, the powers dealing with such possibilities focus on successes needed to freeze (or boil) a target, rather than on the specific temperatures necessary. After all, this is a game, not a science course.

Pyrokinesis

Excitement — that's what Pyrokinesis is all about. It's the ability to lock onto a target and excite its molecules, raising its temperature, changing its physical state, possibly even setting it on fire. At extremes, Pyrokinesis allows a psion to direct the path of excited molecules, exhibiting control over the very size and shape of flames.

• **Flame Immunity:** This basic defensive effect enables the psion to vent excess heat away from himself reflexively. The psion can use Flame Immunity to resist damage from fire, heat or even superheated plasma.

System: Spend a Psi point and roll; each success adds one point to your character's soak against both Bashing and Lethal heat or fire effects. This resistance may also be used against superheated effects such as plasma or lasers, but at half the total successes rolled (rounded up).

This effect activates automatically and lasts for the remainder of the scene. At 3 Pyrokinesis, Flame Immunity may be extended around your character over a number of meters in radius equal to half his Psi score (round up). With four dots in Pyrokinesis, this radius increases equal to your character's full Psi score.

In contrast to Thermal Screen, this power reduces your character's infra-red signature while in effect since he's dissipating heat away from himself (those with IR-sensing equipment who monitor in his direction are at +1 difficulty to detect your character's register).

•• **Heatburn:** The psychokinetic fires a burst of superheated air at the subject. The blistering heat ripples visibly from the psion to his target, and can cause sudden burns and dehydration in living targets, or can ruin data-storage media.

This power actually has a few beneficial applications, as well; the psychokinetic can dehydrate food for easy travel, or can dry out a wet piece of equipment with the proper control.

System: When this power is used against living targets, spend one point and roll Psi. If the roll is successful, your character locks onto his target, and the extreme heat inflicts a Bashing damage Dice Pool equal to his Pyrokinesis score. You may add one die to the damage effect for every success achieved on the Psi roll. Heatburn ignores any armor except those defenses (such as environmental suits or Flame Immunity) that specifically resist such attacks.

Beyond being subject to the effects of extreme heat (see **Sources of Injury — Temperature Extremes**, page 256), living targets may be subject to the effects of dazing and unconsciousness (refer to **Maneuver Complications**, page 246).

Heatburn is handled somewhat differently when used against electronic devices. Spend one Psi and roll, as above. However, this is a resisted action against the device's fail-safe rating (if any). Each extra success on your roll equals a dot reduced permanently from the device's system due to intense heat damage. A standard roll is usually enough to wipe an unprotected disk's data storage.

Your character may affect a target at a range of up to 10 times his Psi rating in meters. At four dots in Pyrokinesis, your character may affect a number of targets equal to his Psi score, simultaneously (if they're

within range). Each target's roll and the results are resolved individually against your single roll.

••• **Ignition:** The psion excites the molecules of combustible objects, bursting them into flames. The materials must be readily flammable — although the psion can set someone's shirt on fire, he can't ignite her tongue.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi to cause a flammable target to burst into flames. The ignition point itself is only a few centimeters in size, but the fire it starts can grow and blaze for some time before burning out. Ignited targets burn for a number of turns equal to the Psi successes rolled. The Storyteller may increase this duration if the flammable target is of significant size or if it comes in contact with other combustible materials.

A person in contact with a burning object suffers two dice of Lethal damage in the first turn, four dice the second turn and five dice each subsequent turn until the last in which the fire burns (during which damage dice return to two). If the fire lasts only three turns, ignore the five-dice effect. If the fire burns for only two turns, roll two dice of Lethal damage each turn. Injuries from fire are handled like any other fire damage (see **Sources of Injury — Fire**, page 255). The victim stops taking damage if the flames are doused or she breaks contact with the source.

Your character can set off a target at a range of up to five times the Mode's rating in meters (at 5 Pyrokinesis, he could ignite a target up to 25 meters away). At five dots in Pyrokinesis, he may light up a number of separate targets within range equal to his Psi score, simultaneously.

•••• **Liquefy:** One of the more dramatic applications of Pyrokinesis, this power enables the psion to excite an object's molecular structure so intensely that it shifts from a solid to a liquid state. The effect works best on materials with a low melting point; cheap plastic is ridiculously simple to liquefy compared to titanium. Although Liquefy can't be used on living beings, it can certainly damage them indirectly — a person touching molten metal is injured severely.

Truly powerful psychokinetics are said to be able to liquefy materials such as wood that would normally combust at high temperatures; the degree of control this requires is staggering.

System: Spend two points and roll Psi; the number of successes required to melt a target depends on the substance. The chart below indicates the number of successes needed to liquefy some sample materials. The targeted substance takes a number of turns to melt completely equal to the successes needed to liquefy it (so orbital steel takes three turns to reach a liquid state). The object's tremendous heat buildup is evident visually and by touch (contact with the substance as it melts inflicts three dice of Lethal damage), giving savvy individuals time to clear the area.

Once liquefied, the substance returns to a solid state in a number of minutes equal to the successes needed to melt it (although the subject usually solidifies in a dramatically different shape).

Successes Needed	Substance
One	Plastic
Two	Copper
Three	Orbital Steel
Four	Granite
Five	Olaminium

If you don't roll the full number of successes required, your character can still increase a substance's temperature by an amount that the Storyteller feels is suitable.

Your character can affect a material up to his Psi score in meters radius (as long as it's within a range of 10 times his Psi rating in meters). At 5 Pyrokinesis, he may liquefy a number of targets equal to his Psi score, simultaneously.

Liquefy can also be used to thaw a frozen liquid (simply use the success chart under Flash Freeze).

••••• **Plasma Control:** The psychokinetic's power can go beyond simple cause and effect at this stage — he can now control fire, dictating its very size, direction and even shape. This effect is particularly potent when combined with flamethrowers and plasma weapons, as the psion focuses the weapon's power into that of a gigantic arc welder. It can also be quite alarming when an ordinary campfire suddenly swells into two blazing hands that proceed to immolate onlookers.

System: Simply altering a fire's shape requires nothing more than a Psi roll; each success indicates a turn during which your character can play with the fire's form. Maintaining Plasma Control for longer than the number of turns rolled requires concentration (+1 difficulty to all other actions) — fire is a tricky beast to tame, after all. A flame source may be affected at a range of up to 30 times your character's Psi score in meters.

Psi points must be spent to increase a fire's size or intensity. Each point spent increases the flame's coverage or range by a meter and adds an additional die to the Lethal damage effect. Any damage done is handled like any other flame effect (see **Sources of Injury — Fire**, page 255).

The effect may be flung indiscriminately over an area, causing the listed damage. Alternatively, it can be focused and directed at a target (roll [Psi + Firearms] to hit); any extra successes achieved in the attack roll are added to the damage effect.

Telekinesis

One of the most instinctive psi abilities, Telekinesis (also called "TK" or "teke") is the ability to move a physical object with sheer mental power. This Mode relies on having items to manipulate; a telekinetic can't block an attack that he can't see coming, nor strike an opponent without a handy missile to throw.

Most Telekinesis powers can be used to affect anything within line of sight, but trying to move something with precision from a distance almost always increases the Psi roll's difficulty, to an extent dependent on how clearly your character can see the target.

Your character can maintain a telekinetic hold or other maneuver while performing other tasks, although doing so incurs a difficulty to his other actions based on the TK effect's complexity. Typically, holding something in place imposes a +1 difficulty to other actions, while fieldstripping a weapon or getting dressed telekinetically applies a +2 to other difficulties. Any actions performed telekinetically that are not routine require your character's full attention.

Holding something with TK isn't like tying a rope to it. If someone else grabs and pulls at an object that your character holds telekinetically, your character isn't dragged along. Control is handled as a resisted roll against the opponent's Might (or relevant telekinetic strength rating if the opponent grabs the object with Telekinesis). Your opponent wrests the object from your character's telekinetic grasp if she succeeds. Each TK effect lists that power's telekinetic strength.

Telekinesis, Inanimate Objects and Living Beings

Inanimate objects cannot resist outside forces, but people can. If your character attempts to use Telekinesis to hold or move an unwilling person (or object capable of independent motion), you must roll Psi against the target's Might in a resisted action. This resisted action is performed *after* you spend Psi points to use the telekinetic power in question.

If the target gets more successes, she resists your character's telekinetic grasp and the power that your character sought to use has no effect. On a tie, the target still resists your character's power, but the target is at +2 difficulty to her next action as a result of struggling against the telekinetic force. If you achieve more successes in the resisted roll, the power takes effect, but is not as potent as normal because the subject continues to struggle against your character's efforts. The extra successes that you roll are used instead of your character's full Psi score to determine the results of his telekinetic control in that particular use of the power (other, simultaneous uses of TK powers are based on normal Psi score). However, a character's normal Psi score is always used to determine the range at which he can use Telekinesis powers.

If your character's effort to manipulate a struggling target fails as a result of a lost resisted roll, the Psi points spent to use the power are lost. No resisted roll is required if a living target is willingly manipulated with TK.

The difficulty of holding or manipulating a living target explains why most psions choose to pelt targets with inanimate objects rather than toss beings themselves around.

For Example: *A character with 9 Psi tries to use Tow to lift a struggling person. The psion's player spends one Psi and then rolls 9 Psi against the target's Might. The player achieves three more successes than the target does; his character has an effective 3 Psi score for determining how much mass can be moved with the Tow power — a maximum of 45 kg, not enough to pick up a full-grown person!*

However, that same character's full Psi score of 9 is high enough to use Tow to slide an empty cargo bin at a target, since the bin cannot resist the telekinetic grab.

No matter how many successes the psion achieves, the range at which he can use Tow is always based on his full 9 Psi.

• **Tow:** The most general, imprecise version of TK, this effect allows a psion to move an object around, and not much else. The psychokinetic can move the target at about the same pace as a slow walk. This power is useful for snatching loose weapons before opponents have a chance to grab them, and to open unsecured doors from a safe distance.

System: Spend a point and roll Psi. An object may be pushed or pulled up to seven meters in a turn; this distance may be increased by one meter for each extra success rolled.

Your character's Tow strength equals half his Psi rating (rounded up); see **Dramatic Systems — Lifting**, page 234, for the mass chart. A character with 3 Psi can tow a 45 kg object, while a psion with 6 Psi can tow a 100 kg object. If the object's mass is one category greater than your character's telekinetic strength, all he can do is drag the thing one meter. Your character cannot move a target of any greater mass. Your character can manipulate an object as long as he concentrates on it (putting him at +1 difficulty to other actions while Tow is active), or until the object moves out of line of sight or is wrested from your character's telekinetic grasp.

Your character can grab a target at a range of up to 20 times his Psi score in meters. At three dots in Telekinesis, your character can move a number of objects at once equal to his Psi rating (although they cannot equal more than his total lifting capacity, and they must all be moved in the same direction).

•• **Remote Manipulation:** The psychokinetic has enough control to use TK as if it were a second pair of hands. He may perform actions remotely that would otherwise require physical touch (such as picking a pocket from across the room or firing a weapon in someone's holster).

System: Spend one Psi point and roll; the number of successes achieved equals the dots of permanent Psi that you may substitute for your character's Strength or Dexterity when using relevant Abilities at a distance. Psi points applied cannot exceed your character's Strength or Dexterity, though. Line of sight is also required.

So if you roll four successes, you may add up to four to the appropriate Ability rating to perform physical acts at a distance, depending on what your character's normal Strength or Dexterity score is. If your character has 3 Strength and 2 Might, you roll five dice [three Psi successes + Might rating] to force a door open. If your character has 5 Dexterity and 4 Firearms, you roll eight dice [four Psi successes + Firearms rating] to fire a distant weapon. If your

character doesn't have any points in a required Ability, he cannot use Remote Manipulation for the desired effect.

The Psi successes rolled also act as your character's telekinetic strength. So with four successes, your character can lift up to 165 kg in normal gravity (see **Dramatic Systems — Lifting**, page 234).

If Remote Manipulation is used on a struggling subject — forcing another person to point and fire his own gun, for example — the psion's player makes a resisted Psi roll against the target's Might, as per the living target rules, above. Any successes that the player achieves in excess of the opponent's are added to the psion's Firearms score to determine the accuracy of the shot.

At 3 Telekinesis, your character is endowed with a kind of "telekinetic touch." He can sense what he manipulates without actually seeing it. However, your character must have a very good idea of where his target is to even "touch" it. He may be able to pick the lock on his handcuffs, but can't jostle a vase in a nearby room if he doesn't know exactly where the object is.

Remote Manipulation can be used for the remainder of the scene once active, and can affect a target at a range of up to your character's Psi score times 10 in meters.

••• **Force Barrier:** The psychokinetic can form an actual wall of telekinetic force. This is by no means a catch-all "force field" that grants the psion invulnerability from any assault. It is, however, an effective barrier against fast-moving attacks.

System: Spend two Psi points. Your character creates a roughly circular barrier with a radius up to his Psi score in meters. This shield is flat (your character could curve it by 30° at most), but may be oriented vertically or horizontally or anywhere in between. Your character can create only one barrier at a time, but it lasts for an entire scene — unless your character is distracted from maintaining it (due to being dazed, for example), or some other psi effect is able to cancel it out.

The barrier is invisible to normal sight, but appears like a scintillating net to anyone using Attunement (see page 191). It may be set around your character anywhere from a few centimeters to five meters distant, and at his front, back, at a side, above or below. Once formed, the barrier stays set to that direction and moves with your character, although he may change its facing whenever he wishes (depending on how involved your character is with other tasks or combat, the Storyteller may consider this a dice action). A shield placed at your character's back covers that area no matter where he goes or in what direction he turns. However, if your character focuses briefly, he can redirect the barrier to protect his front.

This field slows down or even stops high-speed physical objects, from a bullet to a fist, that approach from either side of it. When your character is attacked through the shield, roll Psi in a resisted action against your opponent's attack. If the attacker scores more successes, the attack makes it through and hits your character — although the damage effect Dice Pool before soaking cannot exceed the extra successes your opponent gained in the resisted action. Soak and damage are otherwise handled normally. If you roll an equal or greater number of successes than the attacking opponent, the barrier stops the attack (bullets tumble to the ground, punches seem to sink into invisible taffy). A person thrown at the barrier with great force is slowed to a stop almost immediately, and takes one Bashing Health Level of damage.

The barrier works the same if your character tries to launch a physical attack through it. However, Force Barrier has absolutely no effect on energy or gas attacks. Additionally, a person moving *very* slowly could pass through it in about two turns.

•••• **Flight:** This dynamic ability literally allows the psion to fly! Noeticists are still trying to determine if the psychokinetic uses TK to push away from the ground or to manipulate himself with the power, or if it involves some other esoteric manipulation of psi energy. Whatever the exact method used, flight can be accomplished in an atmosphere and in space. It is indisputably one of the most exhilarating of all psi effects.

System: Spend two points and roll Psi. Your character can move through the air at 10 km/h (roughly walking speed), and the effect lasts for the entire scene (landing cancels the power, however). Each extra success allows your character to increase his speed by 10 km/h. At two successes, you can increase your character's flight speed to a total of 30 km/h.

••••• **Slingshot:** A favorite combat maneuver, this effect allows a telekinetic to accelerate an object to high speeds, effectively turning a pebble into a bullet or a briefcase into a catapult missile.

System: Spend two Psi points and roll. Substitute your character's Psi score for Might on the chart under **Lifting**, page 234(the amount lifted can vary depending on the local gravity; see **Weight vs. Mass** in the same section). Each extra success on the Psi roll may be used on a one-for-one basis to boost your character's Psi rating artificially for calculating the mass he can hurl (see **Dramatic Systems — Throwing**, page 236), or to add a die to the object's damage effect — or both!

For instance, the player of a telekinetic with 4 Psi who gets two extra successes can spend one to sling a 240 kg piece of machinery and can spend the other to add one die to the object's damage effect.

A projectile's base damage effect can vary in both number of dice and type — a plasteel mug may do one die of Bashing damage, while an orbital knife may inflict three dice of Lethal damage. The specific quantity and type are determined by the Storyteller.

Actually striking a target with an object requires a second straight Psi roll; this is handled like any other attack, including adding any extra successes rolled as dice to the damage effect, and reducing for soak. Your character can hurl a number of objects equal to his Psi score at one time, as long as their total mass doesn't exceed his lifting capacity and they're all launched at the same target. While you still make only one initial Psi

roll to hit the target (and must split those extra successes among multiple objects, accordingly), you resolve each missile's strike and damage separately.

Your character can use this power at a range of up to 30 times his Psi score in meters.

If your character uses this power to lift a struggling target, the Psi roll is resisted by the subject's Might, as per the living target rules, above. Those successes rolled in excess of your opponent's determine the amount of mass that your character can lift, and each extra success can be allocated to increase lifting weight or damage effect. If the struggling target is thrown, the second Psi roll is made with a Dice Pool equal to the extra successes of the first roll (if three extra successes were achieved in the first, resisted roll, three dice are rolled to throw the living subject).

Telepathy

Telepathy is the Aptitude that deals the most with the mind — that of the psion *and* his subject! Telepathy has contributed to the state of affairs in the 22nd century to some degree. Paranoia and mistrust are often the rule, as one can never tell when he is being eavesdropped upon mentally. Many nations have imposed or currently argue over laws that restrict use of telepathic powers. In some countries, use of even Mindspeak or Exacerbate invokes charges ranging from invasion of personal privacy to assault (of course, confirming when such an effect has been used brings its own set of difficulties). To be safe, important persons commonly employ psionic dampening bioware to prevent just such unwelcome observation.

Botching

Botching isn't pleasant to start with, but messing up Telepathy imposes its own special problems. The psion may get headache-inducing mental feedback, may simply access the wrong memories or may completely misunderstand another's thoughts. Even worse, the hapless telepath could cross his own mental wires and inflict psionic feedback upon himself, stumble across the subject's deepest fear only to have it become his, or even cause his own psyche to manifest derangements in response to the thoughts he accesses. The Storyteller can (and should) be creative with the possibilities here.

Basic Technique

Mindscan: This Basic Technique is the stepping stone to much greater capabilities. The psion "tunes" his mind to discover a specific individual's psionic resonance. This doesn't allow the telepath to gauge his target's exact location or distance (at best, it conveys a sense of "over there a short distance"). However, Mindscan does give the psion a mental connection to the subject through which he may use more significant psi effects.

System: Roll Psi; success indicates that your character picks up on the subject's psionic signature. Your character must be very familiar with the subject (a good friend, long-time co-worker or close relative) or have a psi print to use this effect. If the technique is used on a casual acquaintance or someone described carefully, roll at +1 difficulty. An individual glimpsed briefly or a telepath working off a name alone incurs a +2 or greater difficulty. Other psi effects such as Psi Cloak may also add to the difficulty.

Mindscan stays active for as long as your character concentrates, but imposes a +1 difficulty to all other actions performed due to the degree of focus required. Sensing range equals 100 meters times your character's Psi score. This distance increases by another 100 meters for each extra success rolled.

Once Mindscan is used to discover a subject, your character gets, at most, a general idea of her location. With three or more successes, your character can confirm if a target is in a specific location. ("She isn't in her flat.") If your character uses Mindscan to locate a subject, it doesn't matter if the target is in his line of sight. The telepath may also use other powers through the Mindscan connection, as long as they aren't normally blocked by distance or physical barriers.

Telepathy and the Language Barrier

Telepathy works without regard for any differences between a psion's linguistic capabilities and his subject's. It doesn't matter if the psion speaks only Mandarin Chinese and his subject knows only a cryptographic version of a Latvian dialect. The concepts communicated are universal. A rose by any other name still smells as sweet.

The ideas communicated through telepathy are not visual — telepaths do not interpret mental rebus puzzles when reading others' thoughts or sending their own. Even highly abstract concepts such as "love" and "quantum physics" are immediately understandable by telepaths reading others' minds.

While most animals don't possess high brain functions, their basic moods and impulses can be sensed by a telepath. Noetic scientists have investigated the complex communications systems of some animals. Research has confirmed that chimpanzees, dolphins, whales, octopi and even pigs and dogs are highly intelligent animals. Further telepathic studies may give humanity a wealth of information regarding our "lesser" cousins.

Universal telepathic communication applies, to some degree, even to alien species. Simple ideas like "chair" and "red" may lose a bit in the translation between human minds and those of other origins, but the fundamental ideas are conveyed nonetheless. Even so, communicating mentally with alien races is definitely a more challenging task than it is with humans.

Empathy

Beyond allowing interpretation of emotion, Empathy gives the psion command over it. This is a subtle yet potent capability, as many Empathy effects can manipulate a subject without that person even being aware of it.

Empathy is used routinely in diplomatic circles, where it is quite beneficial to "get a feel" for one's fellow ambassadors. It is also extremely useful in business ventures, in which every advantage over the competition is an asset.

• **Sense Emotion:** The psion is in tune with the ebb and flow of human emotional tides. He can sympathetically "feel" what his subject feels, and thereby knows that subject's frame of mind.

System: Roll Psi in a resisted action against the target's Rapport Skill Total. The number of successes achieved indicates how much insight your character gets into the subject's current emotional state. A standard success yields a vague impression. ("She's disturbed.") Four extra successes convey the entirety of the subject's condition. ("She's aggravated because she has a cold, she's uncomfortable because her shoes are one size too small, and she's incensed at having to deal with someone as irrelevant as you.") The subject is not aware that his emotions have been put on display for your character's perusal.

Sense Emotion may be used accurately on a visible subject at a range of up to five times your character's Empathy rating in meters. At 3 Empathy, your character can use this effect on a number of targets equal to his Psi score, simultaneously. You still roll only once, but your successes are compared to each subject's resisted Rapport roll.

Used creatively, this power can also reveal whether the last thing a subject said was a lie — telepaths are trained to read the signs of physical and emotional discomfort, as can arise when a subject lies.

•• **Exacerbate:** The telepath, having identified a subject's emotions, can play upon them with subtle psionic manipulation. With just a bit of guidance, displeasure becomes antagonism, interest becomes drive and lust becomes unbridled passion. This power should be used with caution; while a psion can intensify a target's emotions, he cannot necessarily control them.

System: Spend a Psi point and roll; the number of successes on the Psi roll indicates the degree of emotional change. The results are largely a matter of roleplaying, although the Storyteller may choose to assign bonuses or penalties to those who are whipped into an emotional frenzy. This power's effects, once activated, last for the duration of the scene.

When extreme changes are imposed, the Storyteller may allow the target a Willpower roll to control

her passions momentarily. While your character's emotional tampering isn't obvious, a particularly clever or knowledgeable individual might be able to ferret out the reasons behind someone's sudden emotional change.

At two dots, your character merely increases the subject's strongest current emotion, as long as the target is visible within a range of five times your character's Empathy score in meters. At 3 Empathy, he may reduce that emotion's intensity, instead. At four dots in this Mode, your character may use Exacerbate on a number of targets equal to his Psi rating, simultaneously.

The details of extreme emotional change are best left to the Storyteller's discretion.

••• **Emotional Achilles:** Telepaths are no strangers to the uses and abuses of this Aptitude. By using this power, a psion may subdue his own emotions, thereby becoming cold, distant and utterly self-interested. Telepathy powers used against the psion during this time are scarcely effective; his intellectual interests and emotional weaknesses are buried deep within him.

As this power's name implies, however, it has a weakness. If a clever telepath can divine the psion's inner drive, she may break his will and cancel any protection that this power conveys.

Using this effect proves addictive to some telepaths. Growing ever more paranoid, they retreat into their own personalities or erase them — a fact that earns Empathy a negative reputation.

System: Spend one Psi and one Willpower point, then roll Psi. Your character is completely unaffected by *any* Empathy effect for the duration of the scene, no matter how it's used. Any Mindshare or Psychbending powers used against him are also at a difficulty equal to the number of successes achieved on the Psi roll made to activate this power. If you got three successes, opposing telepaths are at +3 difficulty to use Mindshare and Psychbending powers against your character.

If another telepath knows your character's Nature, however, she may affect him as normal. A telepath may only make one "guess" as to this Nature per scene; defeating this power reflects a deep knowledge of the character's psyche, not a simple recitation of the Nature list. Still, telepathy effects, Rapport rolls and Science (Psychology) attempts may help to reveal a telepath's true identity over time.

•••• **The Muse:** This effect enables the psion to incite whatever feeling he wishes to within an audience. Deep sorrow, raging fury, fawning adoration and cowering fear are all at the telepath's disposal. This power is used by petty dictators and politicians during speeches to rally their people into patriotic fervor, and by stage performers who generate vicarious catharsis through their performances.

The Muse is certainly useful to anyone who is in the public eye or who suddenly finds himself facing a crowd of surly antagonists. Obviously, the more skilled the telepath is, the more people he can influence with this power.

System: Spend two Psi points and roll (at +2 difficulty if the targets are initially hostile or antipathetic toward your character). The number of successes achieved on the Psi roll determines how many people are affected by The Muse. The power covers a radius up to 50 times your character's Psi score in meters. The effects last for the duration of the scene, and your character may further alter the subjects' moods during that time with additional Psi rolls.

Successes	Targets Affected
One	Two — You can have a date every night if you want one.
Two	10 — Most popular person in your office.
Three	50 — The life of the party. *Every* party.
Four	200 — Politicos take tips from you.
Five	1000 — Don't cry for me, Argentina.

Those subject to The Muse's effects are not aware automatically that they have been influenced psionically. Yet if an individual's natural inclination toward your character is greatly at odds with the emotion that The Muse imposes, the target may feel anger or embarrassment — and if she's familiar with psi abilities or knows your character is a telepath, it won't be too difficult for her to figure out what has happened.

••••• **Mind Bomb:** Officially known as "Emotional Focal Resurgence," the more blunt term "Mind Bomb" better conveys this power's abrupt and often devastating effect. The telepath reaches into the subject's psyche and triggers whatever deep emotional response that the psion desires (love, peace, hate, sorrow).

It doesn't matter what the target is feeling at the moment; Mind Bomb overwhelms her completely. The power's emotional trigger makes the subject recall the full intensity of an emotion related to an especially significant event in her life. Dredging up such powerful feelings can overwhelm the subject. Mind Bomb is often used with beneficial intent, although the power's harmful applications are evident.

System: Spend three points and roll Psi in a resisted action against the target's current Willpower total. If the subject achieves more successes, she shrugs off the power's effect. On a tie, the target is distracted for one turn by the sudden emotional upwelling she feels, putting her at +2 difficulty to all actions that turn. If your character gets a higher number of successes, the subject falls under Mind Bomb's full effect.

The target is dominated by this power's impulses for a number of minutes equal to the extra successes you roll. If your character wants the target to feel joy, the subject becomes infused with happiness, even tossing aside her weapon and embracing a bitter enemy. If your character dredges up rage in the target, the subject is overcome by violent intent, even lashing out physically at loved ones.

Your character may even set the Mind Bomb to trigger at a later time. Each additional Psi point spent puts off the emotional explosion for one hour (giving the telepath plenty of time to clear the area).

Mindshare

The "traditional" telepathic Mode, Mindshare is the transmission of information from one mind to another. Mindshare depends on waves of psionic energy more so than any other Aptitude does — sensitives claim they literally "see" waves of thought as they move from one person to another.

• **The Babel Effect:** This power enables the psion to access a subject's surface thought patterns that tie directly to what a person is currently saying— and to project the same on others when the telepath himself speaks. Tying mental concept with physical speech in this way enables the psion to create a sort-of "universal translation," no matter what languages individual speakers use.

Noeticists posit that the Babel Effect translates only actual communication (from speech to sign language) and not pure thoughts because the power concentrates on the brain's speech centers. Purely mental communication requires a higher degree of telepathic skill than this effect allows.

System: When your character speaks to someone and translation is necessary, roll Psi. Success indicates that he has no problem comprehending the subject's speech, or communicating his own back for the remainder of the scene.

Your character can use the effect on a total number of subjects equal to his Mindshare rating, simultaneously (3 Mindshare allows for three people to understand one another through the Babel Effect). Again, this technique works with actual physical communication only, whether it's spoken words or gestured signs.

Communicating with aliens may be attempted with a difficulty assigned by the Storyteller (as a reference, the Babel Effect used on a Qin is rolled at +1 difficulty).

•• **Mindspeak:** This effect allows the psion to converse with a subject via pure thought. Each individual need merely think at one another with about the same amount of concentration used to speak verbally. Unlike verbal communication, however, Mindspeak transcends language differences, distance and physical barriers. This level of intimacy disturbs many people, including psions, so it is customary for telepaths to ask for permission before making such contact.

System: Spend one point to initiate Mindspeak between your character and another individual. If the subject resists this attempt, you each roll Psi in a resisted action (even a normal human gets one die). If you get more successes, the link works (but don't expect to have a terribly productive conversation). Actively thinking to disrupt Mindspeak requires the subject's full attention, putting her at +1 difficulty to all other actions as she maintains her "mental screen." Once initiated, Mindspeak lasts for the entire scene on that individual (it can't be shifted suddenly to another subject).

At two dots, Mindshare may be used on a target up to a kilometer distant. If the subject is not in line of sight, a psi print or Mindscan is required to initiate contact. At three dots in this Mode, the distance increases to his Psi rating in kilometers. At 4 Mindshare, range increases to five kilometers per Psi, and a psi print is no longer required (although your character must be familiar with the target, even if only through a hologram). At five dots in this Mode, Mindspeak may be maintained at 10 kilometers for every permanent Psi.

••• **Pilfer:** The psion may search through a subject's memory to extract specific thoughts. No longer limited to conscious thoughts, the telepath has complete access to all of the information stored in the target's mind. Use of this power is immediately recognizable if the subject consciously thinks about whether her mind is being searched (this is why most telepaths prefer to do their Pilfering while their targets sleep).

System: Spend one Psi point and roll. The depth of memories and thoughts that can be isolated depends on the Psi roll's degree of success (see below). The attempt is made at +2 difficulty if the subject resists the search.

While simple facts are gleaned easily, more detailed memories flash into your character's mind almost as if she experiences them herself. If your character or the subject is mentally unstable, such an event can be extremely disturbing.

Successes	Information Revealed
One	Cursory — What the subject had for lunch yesterday; what color underwear she's wearing (if any!)
Two	Consequential — Plans for the evening; parent's phone number
Three	Important — Ambitions and goals; people with whom she is in regular contact
Four	Grave — Criminal activities in which the subject is involved; sordid life affairs
Five	Monumental — Memories of birth; suppressed, very secret thoughts

The length of time needed to transfer this information depends on the successes rolled; one success' worth of information takes a few seconds to understand. Deeper, more detailed memories can take minutes to extract. Entering a target's mind requires line of sight, Mindscan or a psi print (although these are no longer required with four dots in Mindshare), and the subject must be within a range of 100 times your character's Psi score in meters.

•••• **Brainjack:** This power (known as Addling or Befuddlement among polite society) is named after the mental effects it causes in the subject. By interweaving his own random thoughts with those of his subject, the psion engenders such an overwhelming sense of confusion that the target is unable to take any action whatsoever.

There are tales of poor fools who have suffered at the hands of Brainjack, leaving them totally defenseless while antagonistic psions' allies have literally beaten the victims to death. This power is not used lightly, and its implementation is considered assault and battery in most civilized countries.

System: Spend two points and roll Psi. Each success equals a turn in which the subject is hopelessly confused, lost in a whirling dervish of random familiar and foreign mental impulses (effectively, she's dazed, unable to take any actions or to even speak coherently). Your character is at +2 difficulty for the turn following use of Brainjack, due to the brief but intense mental focus the effect requires.

A target may be affected at a range of up to 30 times your character's Psi score in meters. At 5 Mindshare, the psion may Brainjack a number of targets equal to his permanent Psi, simultaneously (although each additional one after the first requires another Psi point and a separate roll, and must be either in line of sight or sensed via Mindscan).

Particularly willful targets (with Willpower scores of 7 or greater) may attempt to throw off the confusion once it has started; the subject may roll Willpower once per turn (against a difficulty equal to the number of successes achieved on your Psi roll) to shake off the confusion and act normally in that turn.

••••• **Network:** The telepath becomes a virtual "switchboard" for a group of select individuals. By opening channels among a number of people, the psion facilitates mental communication between those people. The people to whom the psion extends his services are able to converse from mind to mind.

These individuals are able to carry on full-fledged mental conversations with the entire group, not to merely send thoughts to and receive information from the psion. The psion is skilled enough at this level to filter out most of his own stray thoughts. Others aren't necessarily so capable and may accidentally communicate thoughts meant only for themselves.

System: Spend one Psi for each individual tied into the Network, after which mental communication is possible between the selected members for the entire scene. This power doesn't work on an unwilling subject, and doesn't allow for pilfering or other invasive attempts.

Once linked, any one member with Telepathy may affect another target — or even the entire group — through the Network. Since all of the members of the Network are connected, it's entirely possible that a power used in this way backlashes on its user.

Your character maintains supreme control of the Network, and may shut it off temporarily or even eject an individual from it. Connected subjects may range as far as 30 times your character's permanent Psi in kilo-

meters before contact is broken. The total number of people that your character may connect (aside from himself) equals his Psi score.

Psychbending

This Mode concerns manipulating the conscious and subconscious impulses and actions of others. Skilled Psychbenders can have their way with their subjects, and leave victims oblivious to the experiences afterward. It is just this danger that makes Psychbending punishable as rape in many countries of the world.

• **Willfinder:** The psion attunes himself to others' psionic resonances. He may determine whether a subject is under the influence of a Psychbending power by looking at the emanations of the subject's mind. Not that he can do anything about it.

System: Spend a Psi point. Your character is attuned to the particular psi resonance involved with Psychbending effects for the remainder of the scene. He may check for any mental tampering when interacting with anyone. Make a simple Psi roll for each attempt.

•• **Will Control:** This manifestation of Psychbending covers the submission of the subject's will to the psion's. The telepath transmits a mental command to his subject that she is compelled to obey.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi in a resisted action against the target's Willpower. The command's power and complexity increase along with your character's skill in this Mode. The chart below indicates your character's Psychbending level, and his degree of influence.

If you roll more successes than the subject does, those successes determine his degree of control. If your character gets four successes beyond his opponent's total, he may have the target perform anything up to a complex command. If the subject rolls an equal or greater number of successes, she resists the compulsion. While your character must decide on his command prior to the roll, he may alter it if he succeeds but doesn't score quite enough successes to fulfill the original command.

The target may "buy down" the command's intensity by spending a Willpower point immediately after the resisted action. Each point spent drops the level by one, modifying the command appropriately. Specific alterations to your character's command are left up to the Storyteller, but should somehow suit the original compulsion. For example, a target under a complex command to shoot someone else spends one Willpower point. The Storyteller decides that the subject maintains just enough control to turn her weapon aside and shoot the nearby bulkhead instead.

Successes	Command Intensity
One	Subconscious — Sneeze, blink, scratch an itch
Two	Minor/Quirky — Eat a bug, hail a hovertaxi, wear an ugly shirt
Three	Major/Noteworthy — Do my homework, buy lunch for someone you hate
Four	Complex/Antithetical — Worship a foreign god; fill out this form, place it in an empty locker in the magtrain depot, click your pen three times and hum the following tune...
Five	Epic/Suicidal — Memorize a library's worth of information, cut off your own head

Will Control may be inflicted on any target within a range of up to 10 times your character's Psi score in meters, and lasts until the command is completed.

••• **Mindshield:** The best offense is a good defense...at least with regard to this Aptitude! The psion can safeguard himself against telepathic intrusion. The psion diffuses incoming telepathic effects into harmless waves of psi energy by setting up a barrier of psionic static.

System: Spend one Psi point to put up a Mindshield for the remainder of the scene. Whenever your character is assaulted telepathically, make a resisted Psi roll against the attacker's own roll. If the attacker gets more successes, those are applied to her effect as normal. Otherwise, your character resists the attack.

At 4 Psychbending, your character may bestow Mindshield on others. Your character simply touches the individual; spend a point and roll Psi. The mental barrier surrounds the subject for one minute for each success. Note that the recipient rolls her own Psi score against any attacks while she is gifted with Mindshield.

•••• **Mindwarp:** This aspect of Psychbending is the creation, deletion and alteration of a subject's memories. Governments and secret societies typically keep telepaths skilled in this effect on hand for use against subversive elements. Successful use of Mindwarp can leave the subject changed quite radically from her original state.

System: Spend two Psi and one Willpower, then make a resisted Psi roll against the subject's Willpower. If the target rolls an equal or greater number of successes, she defies the mental manipulation. If you roll more successes than the subject does, these successes indicate the degree of alteration that your character may perform (see the chart on the next page).

Your character must decide his intended memory alteration prior to the roll, but if his successes don't reach the appropriate level needed, the change reduces in intensity. The Storyteller may want to make the resisted roll herself to keep the resolution in doubt. The target may also try to "buy down" the Mindwarp's intensity by spending a Willpower point immediately after the resisted action. Each point spent drops the level of change by one, modifying the alteration appropriately.

Specific changes are left up to the Storyteller, but should suit the original manipulation. For example, a sub-

ject commanded to forget that she was ever married spends one Willpower point. The Storyteller decides that the person knows she was married, but can't remember to whom.

Successes	Degree of Manipulation
One	Trivial — Your phone number is one digit off; you don't remember what brand of liquor you like
Two	Minimal — You forget where you put your credit card; you saw someone else instead of me
Three	Major — You forget where you work; you were married to a person who never existed
Four	Severe — You forget your native language; you remember your mother being a man
Five	Disastrous — You forget to breathe; you remember being born two thousand years ago on the planet Krivos, over one million parsecs away

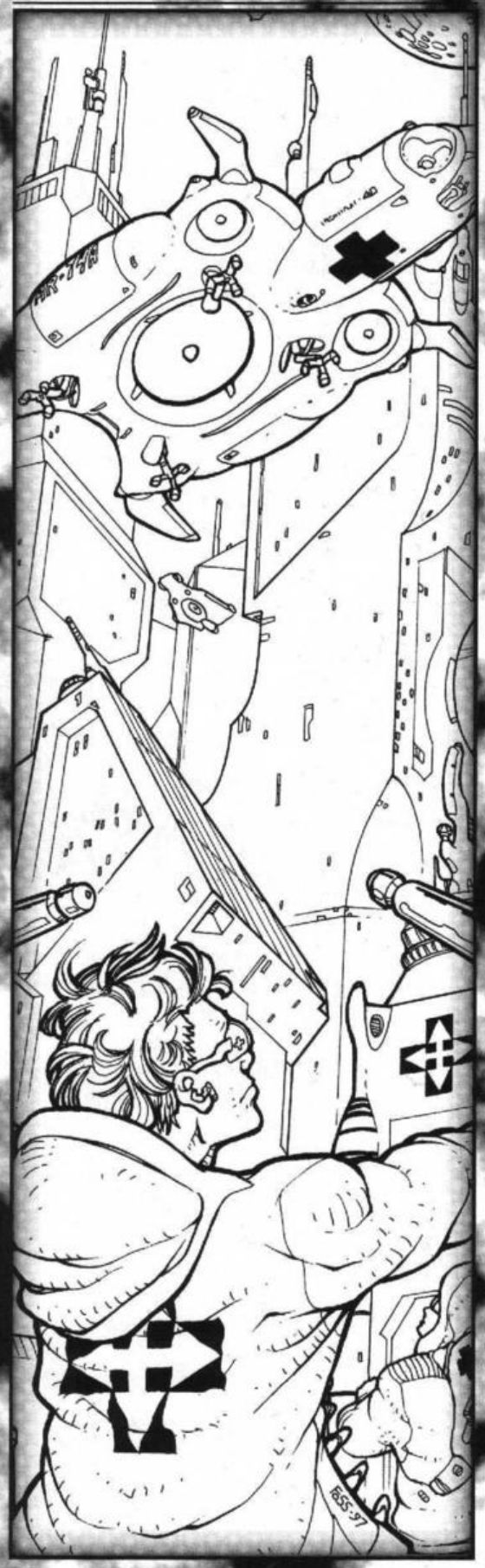
Mindwarp may be inflicted on a target at a range of up to 10 times your character's Psi score in meters, and requires your character's full concentration for a number of minutes equal to the successes needed for the appropriate alteration.

••••• **Shagg's Folly:** This power was named after one of the first psions, who was reputed to live "15 seconds in the future" (his peers were unfamiliar with the fineries of Psychbending). The effect telepathically reveals the immediate plans of all those surrounding the psion. The telepath may then act on this knowledge, anticipating others' movements before they even begin to carry them out.

This power is rumored to have driven many users mad, their minds scrambled by an influx of information at an incredible rate.

System: Spend three Psi points and roll. The number of successes achieved indicates how many individuals' imminent actions are revealed to your character. This starts with the subject closest to your character and radiates outward to the one furthest from him (up to a range of 30 times his Psi score in meters), regardless of whether the individual is friendly or not.

The characters' actions in the *following* turn are revealed, and these declarations must be adhered to as closely as possible. This power can be used for an entire scene once activated, although you must make the Psi roll each turn to anticipate actions accurately. Though Shagg's Folly does not confer any extra speed upon the user, it still prepares your character for events before they unfold.



Vitakinesis

While the assorted Modes and effects of the various Aptitudes can best be described as variations on a theme, vitakinesis debatably offers a wider variation than most. Both physical and mental well-being come under the Aptitude's aegis, as does something a bit darker: the ability to reverse healing powers to cause permanent harm. Training in this Mode, Algesis, is restricted highly and prospective docs must undergo rigid screening before they begin training in it.

Biokinesis and Vitakinesis deal with the manipulation of living forms, but are two distinct Aptitudes; noeticists have yet to determine if this difference is a psychological limitation on the part of the Aptitudes' practitioners or an actual physical restriction. While both Aptitudes access the psi energy flowing through living beings, Vitakinesis isn't limited to the psion's own body. Furthermore, Vitakinesis focuses on life energy, returning the subject to her purest physical (and mental) state. Many biokinetics scoff that they have no need for such assistance. Even so, a significant majority of both psions and normal humans greatly desire the vitakinetics' healing touch.

As with the other Aptitudes, there are far more variations on Vitakinesis than are presented here. Dr. Zweidler has research teams all over the world and throughout known space working on expanding the Æsculapian Order's expertise, but does not feel that findings should be released to the public at this time. What the future holds is anyone's guess.

Botching

Botching a vitakinetic effect involves significant risks, since this Aptitude's powers deal with repairing physical and mental damage. An unfortunate roll could aggravate a wound even further, cause tumors to form or cause even more traumatic effects. Mental derangements could be intensified, from a temporary phobia to possibly even insanity. The Storyteller should think carefully about such possibilities, from the embarrassing to the gruesome.

Basic Technique

Kirlian Eye: This technique is equally useful for sizing up an opponent or for performing triage on a patient. Kirlian Eye allows the psion to take a quick peek at the "life-field" of whomever he is currently studying. While it's agreed that Kirlian Eye enables the psion to view the psi energy flowing around an individual, some psions claim that it allows them to see spiritual "auras," and that they can discern a great many things from the shape and flow of auras glimpsed. Few take these claims seriously.

System: Roll Psi. If successful, your character can tell at a glance how healthy the subject is (generally by referencing the subject's current Health Level), and may also gain insight into her current emotional state.

Iatrosis

This Mode explores the use of psi energy to heal physical injury. Physical contact is required for these effects, and many of its practitioners actually generate a visible glow around their hands when using Iatrosis powers. A psion can knit broken bones, cure diseases, close wounds and even regenerate mutilated flesh or organs. The only limit is the healer's will, expertise and Psi.

• **Mending:** The psion can heal minor damage and even alleviate temporarily the pain and discomfort caused by more severe wounds. Mending is useful in a number of ways: healing bumps and scrapes, stabilizing critically wounded patients in the field, and halting excessive bleeding.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi. Each success rolled equals one Bashing Health Level that the target heals immediately. Any leftover successes may soothe temporarily the effects of Lethal damage, with each success negating the Dice Pool penalties for being at a particular Health Level on a one-for-one basis. The soothing effect against Lethal damage lasts an hour for each dot your character has in Iatrosis. Additionally, if the Lethal damage involves continuous bleeding, Mending stops the loss altogether.

Say you roll three successes in treating a subject who has suffered four levels of Lethal damage and two of Bashing (putting her at Crippled). The first two successes heal the Bashing levels (bringing the subject to Wounded). While the last success cannot heal a Lethal level, the grateful subject nonetheless feels like she's only Injured (she loses only one die from her rolls instead of two for her actual Wounded status).

A character who has taken Lethal damage and who benefits from Mending must still be careful. While she may feel relatively healthy, her body still suffers from physical trauma. If the subject engages in strenuous activity (running, combat and the like), she must roll Endurance. If she fails the roll, the subject suffers a Bashing Health Level (although the effects aren't actually felt until Mending wears off).

At 3 Iatrosis, your character may use this effect on a target at a range of up to three times his Psi rating in meters.

•• **Antitoxin:** This power enables the vitakinetic to accelerate his patient's physical systems to fight any toxin, fungus or virus introduced by an outside agent. The infusion of psi energy literally charges the patient's immune system so that it can resist any intrusions.

System: Spend one Psi and roll; each success on the Psi roll reduces the toxin's effectiveness by one (refer to the chart, above, for examples). If the infection or poison's rating drops to zero, the patient is considered cured. Antitoxin can combat most bacterial infections and even the most deadly of viruses. However, it is ineffective against effects that literally destroy a subject's tissues, as hard-radiation poisoning, gangrene and cancer do.

Toxin Rating	Virus Equivalent	Toxin Equivalent
One	Common Cold	Alcohol
Two	Chicken Pox	Food Poisoning
Three	Influenza	Ptomaine
Four	AIDS	Cleaning Supplies
Five	Ebola	Cyanide

Your character can also use this effect to render a subject immune to viral or fungal infections or poisons prior to exposure. In this circumstance, each success on the Psi roll gives the subject a level of soak against such influences (see **Sources of Injury — Disease**, page 254, and **Poison and Drugs**, page 255). This defense lasts an hour for each dot of permanent Psi that your character has. At 3 Iatrosis, this duration extends to three hours per dot, while at level four it increases to nine hours per Psi dot. At 5 Iatrosis, the resistance lasts a number of days equal to your character's Psi score.

••• **Metamitosis:** The psion can literally mend flesh and bones. The vitakinetic focuses psi energy to encourage extremely rapid yet controlled cellular growth in the subject. Even the most grievously wounded individual may be healed in a matter of minutes at the hands of a skilled vitakinetic (although the grateful patient is possessed of a ravenous appetite due to the nutrients his body used up during the accelerated healing process).

The levels restored by Metamitosis appear within moments, but your character must be careful or the subject might not heal properly. Bones can be set at the wrong angles, and damaged organs can be restored but might function improperly. There are risks to demanding immediate results.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi. Your character can restore a Lethal Health Level for each success rolled (up to a maximum of five). The cellular repair takes one minute per Level healed. Any more Health Levels that require healing call for a new application of Metamitosis.

At 4 Iatrosis, your character may use this effect on a target at a range of up to five times his Psi score in meters. At five dots in this Mode, he may heal two Lethal Health Levels per success rolled (to a maximum of 10).

•••• **Cellular Repair:** This effect enables the vitakinetic to cleanse a patient's body of cancerous, irradiated or otherwise mutated cells. The psion focuses on the subject's biological "template," calling forth the original cellular makeup. The mutated cells are literally flushed from the patient's system as an inert gray biopaste.

System: Spend two Psi and one Willpower, then make a Psi roll. The number of successes achieved indicates the degree of cleansing accomplished (see the chart, on the next page, for examples). Some cancers require less intensive efforts than others do, but even if a cleansing isn't complete, it can still offer the subject a respite. Reconstruction isn't immediate, requiring an hour of your character's full concentration per success rolled.

Although (hopefully) restored to full health, the subject must still recuperate after this procedure. To determine recovery time, use the number of successes applied as the "Lethal Health Level" that the patient is currently at (see the **Lethal Damage** sidebar, page 253). If three successes were needed, the patient would still need to recover as if she were at Injured.

Success	Mutation Equivalent
One	Benign tumor, minor soft-radiation damage
Two	Malignant tumor, major soft-radiation damage
Three	Significant cancerous growth/minor hard-radiation damage (20% cell mutation)
Four	Major cancerous growth/hard-radiation damage (50% cell mutation)
Five	Massive cellular degeneration (90% cell mutation)

••••• **Regeneration:** The psion can use this awesome power to literally regrow damaged or missing organs or limbs. Vitakinetics use Regeneration sparingly, as it is a highly complex and draining experience. (Rumors also abound that there's some fear involved in its application — there are tales of a psion suddenly manifesting all of the wounds he had ever healed and subsequently dying a hideous, quick death.)

System: Spend four Psi points and make a roll at +2 difficulty. The number of successes achieved indicates the degree of regeneration possible (refer to the chart, below). If fewer successes are rolled than are needed, the subject regenerates only partially. Subsequent attempts may be made at any time as long as your character has enough Psi points to spend.

This effect takes some time to initiate and to be resolved. Your character must focus his entire attention on the subject for a number of hours equal to the successes needed, and cannot recover Psi until this time has elapsed. The regeneration itself then takes time; determine recovery time as for Cellular Repair. Any Health Levels lost due to amputation or massive trauma are regained when regeneration is complete.

Under absolutely no circumstance can this power be used to resurrect the truly dead, though those who have not yet suffered brain death can be brought back on occasion.

Success	Regeneration
One	Finger, eye
Two	Hand, foot, jaw
Three	Limb, simple internal organ (gall bladder, intestine)
Four	Major internal organ (heart, lung, liver)
Five	Spine, brain

Mentatis

Healing the mind is just as important as healing the body. Psions with this Mode heal wounded minds and psyches rather than torn flesh and broken bones.

A more subtle path than Iatrosis, Mentatis requires the vitakinetic to attune himself to the subject's mental rhythms, most effectively by touching the patient's head (it also usually requires that the patient be conscious). Some psions claim these requirements help them tap into a subject's mental aura, others that it simply allows for clear sensing. Whatever the justification, physical contact is key to using Mentatis powers effectively (+2 difficulty if using these powers at a distance or working on an unconscious patient).

• **Mind's Eye:** Commonly used in psychiatric therapy, Mind's Eye allows a vitakinetic to gain insight into what's troubling his patient. Unlike Telepathy, this power doesn't allow the psion to roam around the subject's mind. Instead, it seeks out the greatest source of psychological trauma, giving the psion a vision of the problem.

System: Roll Psi; success gives a brief impression of the cause of the subject's anxiety. This can be a highly subjective impression; each extra success enables your character to gain a clearer and more complete picture of the patient's condition.

At 3 Mentatis, your character may use Mind's Eye at a range of three times his Psi score in meters.

•• **Passive Voice:** A psion doesn't actually perform any healing with Passive Voice. Instead, this power moderates extremes of emotion, making it useful for dealing with murderous rages, psychotic episodes and paralyzing fear. Someone touched with Passive Voice is forced into a state of reasonable calm, even if he still wants to be angry. This power does not make its targets more susceptible to suggestion or in any way more pliable, but does calm them, making them less prone to violent action.

System: Spend a point and roll Psi in a resisted action against the target's *current* Willpower. Each extra success you roll translates into a minute during which the subject is calmed. The target doesn't act aggressively (until, perhaps, the effect wears off). The subject can ignore this effect by spending a Willpower point, but that only weakens her against the next attempt....

At two dots, your character must touch the subject. At three dots in this Mode, he may use Passive Voice at a range of up to three times his Psi score in meters. At 4 Mentatis, your character may apply this power against a number of targets equal to his Psi score, simultaneously.

••• **Ease Trauma:** This effect enables the psion to free a subject from mental pain temporarily. This could include dampening a phobia or easing an irrational hatred. This power is often used in psychotherapy, to talk to a patient about her derangements.

Some Æsculapians have become addicted to using this effect on themselves, as it suspends feelings of fear or disgust that some feel when dealing with especially traumatized patients.

System: Spend one Psi point and make a roll; the subject's mental trauma is dampened one hour for each success. This respite is only temporary, however. When the duration ends, the dampened trauma — and all of its negative effects — returns in full force.

•••• **Chemical Block:** Many behavioral irregularities can be traced to chemical imbalances in the brain. Treating those problems is a matter of adjusting the brain's delicate balances; the vitakinetic can address any chemically imposed behavioral aberrations — even those caused by ingested drugs. Chemical Block enables a psion to perform this task through force of will, forcing the patient's body to regulate itself — at least temporarily.

Since this power replaces the necessity of drug treatments, some mercenary vitakinetics have taken to doling out "noetic treatments" at ever-increasing rates.

System: Spend two points and roll Psi at +1 difficulty. If the roll is successful, the patient's body modifies its chemical output to bring it in line with the desired behavior (which your character must state prior to the roll). Chemical Block lasts one day for each success rolled (although this may vary by a few hours at the Storyteller's discretion). Still, this wondrous effect is not without its risks — forcing rapid alterations in a body's chemical structure can produce unforeseen side effects, sometimes making a cure worse than the ailment.

At 5 Mentatis, each success rolled lasts a week (and likely comes with an even higher "service charge").

••••• **Knit Psyche:** This power enables the psion to resolve complicated mental traumas, deep-rooted mental illnesses and long-buried phobias — or at least alleviate them to some degree. While the effects of this power are neither immediate nor visible, they are extremely potent.

This power can cause a side effect that manifests in the vitakinetic himself, which noeticists have labeled "psi leakage." When afflicted, the psion exhibits his patient's Nature for up to a week, and may "remember" things that actually happened to the patient. Over two dozen documented cases of psi leakage have brought Æsculapian researchers no closer to discovering the root of this affliction.

System: Spend three Psi and make a roll at +1 difficulty; the number of successes achieved indicates how well the treatment takes. Knit Psyche requires your character to focus entirely on the patient for a full three hours. While there are no hard and fast rules for what sort of illness or injury can be healed this way, examples include physical brain damage, deep-seated psychoses and extreme sociopathic behavior.

Any successful use of Knit Psyche should at least set the patient on the road to recovery, but the timetable to achieve full health can range from a day to years.

Algesis

This Mode delves into the darker applications of manipulating a target's physical condition. Algesis effects harm instead of heal, and only those vitakinetics proven to be psychologically stable learn to use these powers. Zweidler and his staff recognize this as a necessary evil, since the other orders aren't around at all times to protect the docs. (Although the Æsculapians retain a large number of non-vitakinetic psions to serve as a highly visible, private security force.)

• **Inflame:** While this power can't inflict new injuries on a target, it can exacerbate existing ones. Lacerations, blunt traumas, burns — there's no sort of injury so bad that Inflame can't make it worse. There is often some sort of visible effect attached to this power; bandaged wounds start bleeding again, and burned skin visibly blackens further.

System: Spend a point and roll Psi in a resisted action against the subject's Resistance. If you get more successes, each extra success translates into a Bashing Health Level applied to the target. If the rolls tie, the subject feels a twinge of pain, putting her at +1 difficulty to her action in the next turn.

Inflame doesn't cause new wounds, but intensifies the pain of existing ones. Your character may therefore only cause a total number of Bashing Health Levels equal to the amount of damage the subject has already taken.

This effect may be used on a target at a range of a number of meters equal to your character's Algesis rating. At 4 Algesis, it may be used against as many targets as your character has Psi, simultaneously.

•• **Contusion:** The vitakinetic channels his psi to cause a target minor physical trauma. This damage manifests as a bloody nose or a bruised muscle.

System: Spend one Psi point and roll. The base Bashing damage effect inflicted equals your character's Psi score plus any extra successes rolled; you may also add a die for each additional Psi point spent. Contusion may be soaked like any other Bashing effect, although the power bypasses armor.

This power may be used at a range of up to three times your character's Psi rating in meters. At 4 Algesis, your character can use Contusion on a number of subjects equal to his Psi score, simultaneously. The damage effect is rolled separately for each target.

••• **Algesic Shield:** The vitakinetics developed this power in an attempt to protect themselves from their own attacks. The buffer consists of fluctuating psi energy tuned to resist any physiological manipulations — specifically Algesis effects (although the vitakinetics were pleased to discover that it also seems to offer defense against some biokinetic and electrokinetic powers).

System: Spend one Psi point and make a Psi roll; the shield lasts one minute for each success. The Algesic Shield is as versatile as it is powerful. While the field is up, your character uses [Psi + Resistance] against Inflame, Lacerate and Morbidity, and against the Electrokinetic powers Stun and Control.

Additionally, you may add your character's Psi score to his soak against the effects of Contusion, the

Biokinetic power Catabolysis, and against the Electrokinetic powers Disruption and Feedback.

At 5 Algesis, your character can endow this effect on another individual. You must make a second Psi roll, however; the successes on that roll indicate the rating that the subject uses against the listed effects.

•••• **Lacerate:** The psion does little more than tear at the subject's physical form with savage thrusts of psi energy. The inflicted wounds manifest as either gashes in the skin or as severe hemorrhaging, usually just below the skin where the pooling blood can be seen. In either case, the results are visible and hard to disguise — not to mention extremely painful.

System: Spend two points and make a resisted Psi roll against the target's Resistance. Each extra success you get above the opposing roll equals one Lethal Health Level of damage that the target takes. On a tie roll, the subject is at +2 difficulty to her actions in the next turn as a wave of pain ripples through her body.

Lacerate may be used at a distance of up to three times your character's Psi rating in meters. At five dots in this Mode, your character may inflict this power simultaneously on a number of targets equal to his Psi score, simultaneously (you still only roll once; each opponent rolls Resistance separately).

••••• **Morbidity:** The vitakinetic can inflict massive damage on a target, usually by exploding the victim's heart, collapsing her lungs so that she spits up a fountain of blood, or something equally dramatic.

System: Spend three Psi and one Willpower point, and make a Psi roll at +1 difficulty. The target takes a number of Lethal Health Levels equal to your character's Psi score. This damage ignores all armor, though its specific form can take whatever the player and Storyteller agree upon.

Even if the target takes only one Health Level, she still suffers intense pain from the attack. The subject must succeed on a Willpower roll or lose her next action due to the agony inflicted. After all, having your heart burst even a little bit is enough to distract the most focused individual.

At Storyteller discretion, your character can specify the physical harm he tries to cause, which may or may not have an impact on the attack's effectiveness. For example, a Morbidity assault on the heart of someone who recently suffered cardiac arrest might require fewer levels of damage than normal to have fatal results.

It is extremely difficult to make death by Morbidity look like an accident. Even if a forensics expert didn't know what she was looking for when performing an autopsy on a victim of Morbidity, she could still be bright enough to bring the body to the local rex shop for examination, which could lead to some very interesting questions.

While **Æon**'s focus is on roleplaying and character interaction, such drama often involves some element of dice rolling. As **Chapter One: Systems** shows, the rules are designed to streamline this process as much as possible so that you can pay attention to the story. To assist you and the Storyteller further, this chapter covers more specific dice mechanics, including general dramatic systems, combat, damage and recovery.

Dramatic Systems

The only things limiting your actions are your imagination and your character's skill. During a game session, characters — both player and Storyteller personalities — attempt numerous diverse and complicated activities. The Storyteller is responsible for keeping all of this action organized while determining success or failure for all characters.

Dramatic systems simplify the Storyteller's job by supplying rules for a number of common activities. The appropriate Ability is bracketed after the system in question in each case. If a task requires a Specialty, you may add a die to your character's Dice Pool for that test.

Storytellers should, and will undoubtedly have to, invent their own dramatic systems for new situations. The list of systems below is in no way exhaustive, but provides a solid foundation on which to base events. Bear in mind that characters lacking a specific Ability may default to the Attribute on which the Ability is based, unless stated otherwise.

A number of these systems may be tried again if the first attempt is unsuccessful. Subsequent efforts may require additional difficulties, however, at the Storyteller's discretion (see **Second Chances**, page 162).

Physical Tests

These systems cover tasks involving the three Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina).

• **Climbing [Athletics]:** When your character climbs an inclined surface (rocky slope, cargo container or building), roll Athletics. For an average climb with available handholds and nominal complications, your character moves three meters for every success. The Storyteller adjusts this distance based on the climb's difficulty (easier: four meters per success; more difficult: two meters per success). The number of handholds, smoothness of the surface and, to a lesser extent, weather can all effect rate of travel. A short, difficult climb may have the same difficulty as a long easy climb. The extended action lasts until you've accumulated enough successes to reach the desired height. On a mild botch, your character may only slip or get stuck; on a more severe one, she may fall.

• **Driving/Piloting [Drive, Pilot]:** A Drive or Pilot roll isn't needed to steer a vehicle under normal circumstances — assuming your character has the appropriate skill. Bad weather, the vehicle's speed, obstacles and performing complex maneuvers can challenge even the most competent drivers. Specific difficulties based on these circumstances are up to the Storyteller, but should increase as the conditions become more hazardous.

For example, driving in heavy rain is +1 difficulty, but going fast while also trying to lose a tail jumps the difficulty to +3. Similarly, piloting a spacecraft through an asteroid field is +1, but adding a breakneck pace while avoiding pursuit bumps it to +3. A failed roll indicates trouble, requiring an additional roll to avoid crashing or losing control. Characters in control of a vehicle, and who have no dots in the appropriate Ability, must roll for almost every change in course or procedure. On a botch, the vehicle may spin out of control or worse.

• **Encumbrance [Might]:** The temptation to carry loads of equipment to satisfy every situation can be overwhelming. The Storyteller should make life difficult for players whose characters have extensive equipment and weaponry lists. Your character can carry 10 kilograms (22 pounds) in normal gravity for each dot in your Might Skill Total without penalty.

Should your character exceed this total, every action involving physical skills incurs an automatic +1 difficulty due to the added weight. Also, for every 10 kg over the allocation, your character's base movement drops by one meter (see **Movement**, page 158). A change in gravity may also adjust your character's encumbrance (see **Weight vs. Mass** and **Gravity**, next page). If the total weight carried doubles her Might allocation, your character can't move. This system is a guideline and should not call for an inventory check every time your character picks up a pen.

• **Feats of Endurance [Endurance]:** Endurance determines how well and for how long your character can run beyond her normal capacity, stay awake after a day of activity, or hold her breath for an abnormally long time. Sustaining such acts depends on your character's Endurance Skill Total (see **Sources of Injury**, page 254), and after that point requires Endurance rolls. The frequency of the rolls can range from every hour for trying to stay awake, each half-hour or so for maintaining physical activity, or every few seconds to keep holding breath.

The Storyteller should add +1 difficulty (cumulative) to each subsequent roll after the first to reflect the increasing strain on your character's vitality. Botches should suit the feat attempted (e.g., stumbling, reflexively gasping for air, nodding off, lunging for the nearest available food).

• **Jumping [Might]:** In normal Earth gravity, each success on a Might roll launches your character half a meter vertically or two meters horizontally. On a botch, your character may trip over her own feet, leap right into a wall or do something similarly embarrassing. Non-Earth gravity environments modify these distances by applying modifiers directly to your character's Strength (see **Gravity**, below).

• **Lifting [Might]:** The chart below provides Might Skill Totals needed to deadlift various mass categories. The Storyteller determines any difficulties involved in lifting; generally, the number of dots by which your character is below the minimum Might rating required is the additional difficulty incurred to lift the object. However, if her Might Skill Total is at least one dot higher than the minimum needed, the Storyteller may allow your character to pick up the item without having to roll. Gravity can factor in as well; objects are easier to pick up in a low-gravity environment, and more difficult to lift in a high-gravity one (see **Weight vs. Mass** and **Gravity**, below).

Might Skill Total	Mass (kg)	Example
•	15	Chair
••	45	
•••	100	Grown person
••••	165	
•••••	240	Empty cargo bin
••••• •	300	
••••• ••	360	Hovercycle
••••• •••	420	
••••• ••••	480	Girder
••••• •••••	550	

Characters can work together to lift an object. This is simply a teamwork roll with the individual players rolling separately and combining any resulting successes.

Lifting is all or nothing — if you fail the roll, nothing happens. At the Storyteller's discretion, the difficulty may be reduced by one if all your character wants to do is drag something a short distance instead of pick it up. On a botch, your character may strain something or drop the object on her own foot.

• **Opening/Closing [Might]:** Opening a door with brute force calls for a Might roll. A standard interior door requires only one success to bash open or slam shut. A reinforced door or airlock generally takes five successes. A maglocked blast door might take 10 successes. These successes may be handled as an extended action. While teamwork is possible (and recommended), a door can still be forced open through a single individual's repeated hammering. Obviously, a door not held in some way can be opened without resorting to force. A botch causes a few levels of Bashing damage to your character's shoulder.

• **Pursuit [Athletics, Drive, Pilot]:** Catching someone who's trying desperately to avoid your character involves several different rolls and can include Tracking or Investigation. Basic pursuit is an extended action. The target starts with a number of free extra successes based on his distance from pursuers. This breaks down as follows: on foot, one for every two meters ahead of pursuers; in vehicles, one for every 10 meters

Weight vs. Mass

The terms "weight" and "mass" are often used to denote the same thing: how much substance an object has. This isn't entirely accurate. In scientific terms, "weight" refers to the gravitational force applied to an object; this influence doesn't change that item's inherent mass.

For ease of reference, all such quantities in **Æon** are listed as "mass" no matter where the object may be (so a rock falling down a lunar mountainside is described as having a *mass* of 700 kg, not as *weighing* its equivalent 119 kg). Earth gravity is the accepted standard for weight quantities, so "mass" and "weight" may be used interchangeably in normal gravity.

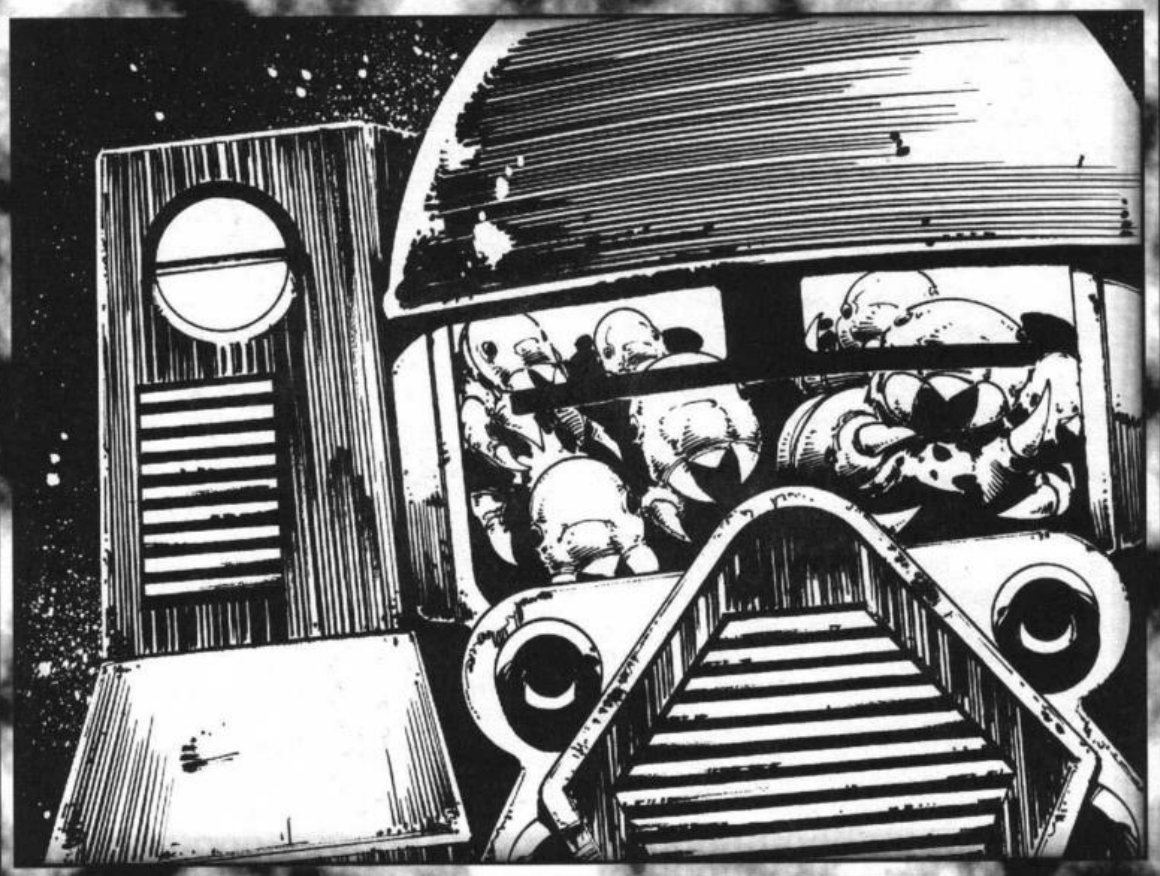
To determine an object's weight, simply multiply its mass by the local gravitational field strength. A cargo bin that weighs just over 240 kg on Earth weighs only 91 kg in Mars' natural gravity (mass 240 kg x Martian gravity of .38 Earth-standard = 91 kg).

Just because something weighs less doesn't mean its mass is reduced. That empty cargo bin may be easier to pick up on Mars than it is on Earth, but it will hurt just as much if it falls on your character on either planet.

Gravity

Operating in nonstandard gravity is often difficult. People raised in a 1 g (normal Earth-gravity) environment are stronger and more durable in low gravity, but are slowed down and weakened in high gravity. The effects of gravity changes are applied to characters in a straightforward fashion to reduce the need for formulas and complex mechanical systems.

Your character operates with one extra dot in both Strength and Stamina in .6 g or lower, but loses one dot from Dexterity. Your character loses two dots from both Strength and Dexterity in 1.5 g or higher, since she's constantly resisting the increased pull of gravity. These adjustments affect not only Dice Pools, but also jumping distances, initiative, encumbrance and endurance.



ahead of pursuers; in spacecraft, one for every 10 kilometers ahead of pursuers. Exceptionally long foot chases might involve Endurance tests.

The target and pursuers roll the appropriate Ability (depending on the type of pursuit) each turn, adding new successes to any successes rolled in previous turns. When the pursuer accumulates more total successes than the target has, she catches up and may take further actions to stop the chase. As the target accumulates successes, he gains distance from his pursuers and may use that lead to lose his opponents. Each success that the quarry accumulates beyond the pursuer's total acts as a +1 difficulty to any Awareness rolls that pursuers have to make to remain on the target's tail. The Storyteller may call for the pursuer to make an Awareness roll at any time (although not more than once each turn). If the pursuer fails this roll, her target is considered to have slipped away (into the crowd, off the sensor screen). On a botch, the pursuer loses her quarry immediately. If the quarry botches, he stumbles or ends up at a dead end.

• **Resistance [Resistance]:** The Health track on your character sheet normally declares the number of dice you lose from Dice Pools as your character takes damage. You may roll Resistance as much as once each turn; a successful roll restores a number of dice to your pool equal to your Resistance Ability rating (*not* Skill Total). The restored dice last for as many turns as successes you roll. This benefit requires the Resistance Ability; it cannot be performed as a default task.

• **Shadowing [Stealth]:** Shadowing someone requires that your character keeps tabs on the target without necessarily catching her — *and* while not being noticed by her! The target can roll Awareness whenever she has a chance to spot her tail (the Storyteller decides when such an opportunity arises); the pursuer opposes this with a Stealth roll. The target must get at least one more success than her shadow does to spot the tail; if so, she may act accordingly. This resisted action is handled individually for each person shadowing the target (if the target is being followed by three people, her player makes three separate Awareness rolls, one against each target's Stealth roll).

• **Sneaking [Stealth]:** Rather than fight through every situation, your character can use stealth and cunning instead. A sneaking character uses Stealth as a resisted action against Awareness rolls from anyone able to detect her passing. Unless observers receive more successes than the sneaking character does, she passes undetected. Noise, unsecured gear, lack of cover or large groups of observers can increase Stealth difficulty. Security devices, scanners or superior vantage points may add dice to Awareness rolls. On a botch, the character stumbles into one of the people she's avoiding, accidentally walks into the open, or performs some other obvious act.

• **Swimming [Endurance]:** Assuming your character can swim at all (being able to do so requires one dot of Athletics), long-distance or long-duration swimming requires successful Endurance rolls. The first roll is necessary only after the first half-hour of sustained activity; only one success is needed. A +1 difficulty, cumulative, is applied for each subsequent half-hour. If a roll fails at any time, your character tires; she may float, but is too exhausted to swim. Your character can rest by floating, but the current difficulty doesn't drop until she can get to solid ground and recuperate. On a botch, your character starts drowning (see **Sources of Injury — Suffocation and Drowning**, page 255).

• **Throwing [Might]:** Objects (grenades, knives) with a mass of one kilogram or less can be thrown a distance of Might Skill Total x 5 in meters. For each additional kilogram of mass that an object has, this distance decreases by five meters (particularly heavy objects don't go very far). As long as the object's mass doesn't reduce throwing distance to zero, your character can pick up and throw it without having to make a Might roll. A character with 5 Might Skill Total can throw a 1 kg object 25 meters. She can throw a 2 kg object 20 meters, and a 5 kg object five meters. If an object can be lifted, but its mass reduces throwing distance to zero, the object can be hurled aside at best — about one meter's distance. Obviously, if an object can't be lifted, it can't be thrown at all (refer instead to **Lifting**, page 234).

The Storyteller may reduce throwing distances for particularly unwieldy objects, or increase them for aerodynamic ones. On a botch, your character may drop the object or strike a companion with it.

• **Zero-G Maneuvering [Athletics]:** While anyone can "maneuver" in microgravity, your character must have at least one dot in Athletics to accomplish anything remotely complex. Moving from one handhold to another can be complicated under awkward circumstances. Normal maneuvers (recovering from a spin, moving through close quarters, leaping across open rooms) require a standard Athletics roll. Difficulties apply if you want to catch moving objects or to regain momentum from a dead stop (the specific difficulty depends on the maneuver's complexity). On a botch, your character may carom off a bulkhead, spin out of control or end up facing in the wrong direction.

Mental Tests

These systems cover tasks involving the three Mental Attributes (Perception, Intelligence and Wits). Mental tests provide you with information about things your character knows, but you don't, or they determine your character's skill at certain mental tasks. Still, you should depend on your creativity when solving problems — not on dice rolling.

• **Awareness [Awareness]:** This involves picking a face out of a crowd, keeping an eye on someone, and being aware of one's surroundings. Anything that doesn't require specific training in observation, as Investigation does, is covered by Awareness.

• **Hacking [Engineering]:** The average person's skill in computers is minimal in the 22nd century as computers have become highly interactive with users. Most computer hacking, in fact, is performed by a computer's avatar. The hacker rolls Engineering (add one die if specialized in Computers). If the avatar is the hacker, roll its equivalent Engineering rating. If a system has a fail-safe rating, you make a resisted Engineering roll against the fail-safe roll. Your extra successes are the number of dice (up to your normal Skill Total) that can be rolled to interact with the system once it's been breached.

Actively blocking a hacker is a resisted action; the adversary with the most successes wins. On a botch, you may trip a flag or even reveal your identity to the system you're trying to breach. Hacking requires the Engineering Ability; your character cannot perform it as a default task (although she could command her avatar to do it).

• **Hibernation [Meditation]:** A character can use this unusual technique to stave off the detrimental effects of starvation, temperature extremes or oxygen deprivation. Roll Meditation at +2 difficulty for your character to enter a hibernation trance. Your character's heart rate slows to a crawl, breathing is virtually nonexistent, and the psion is totally unaware of her environment. Each extra success rolled equals a day that your character can exist in even extreme temperatures without need of sustenance, and she requires only minimal air. Once the allotted time is up, your character wakes feeling as if only a number of hours, not days, has passed.

If your character is forced awake before the designated time, you must succeed at an Endurance roll or your character suffers a base +2 difficulty on all actions for the next hour because of the jarring transition (if your character was in hibernation for a few days, this difficulty penalty is imposed for a few hours — until her fluid and nutrient levels return to normal). On a botch, your character may only fall asleep or may even drop into a coma. Hibernation requires the Meditation Ability; it cannot be performed as a default task.

• **Investigation [Investigation]:** Any search for clues, evidence or hidden contraband involves Investigation. The Storyteller may add a difficulty to investigations involving obscure clues or particularly well-concealed objects. One success reveals basic details, multiple successes provide detailed information and may even make deductions possible based on physical evidence. On a botch, obvious clues may be missed or even destroyed accidentally.

• **Intrusion [Intrusion]:** Intrusion covers breaking and entering, evading security devices, picking locks, bypassing keypad and retinal countermeasures — and preventing others from doing the same. When

bypassing active security, your roll must succeed on the first attempt; failure activates any alarms present (opening manual locks may be attempted multiple times, though). Intrusion rolls are usually standard actions, but may be difficult actions depending on a security system's complexity (the Storyteller decides the actual difficulty). On a botch, the clumsy break-in attempt goes horribly awry.

Setting up security measures is a standard action, but multiple successes achieved in the effort increase the system's quality (essentially adding to its difficulty to be breached).

• **Psi Recovery [Meditation]:** Your character may recover Psi points more quickly than normal by focusing on the "flow" of psi energy around her. For every 15 minutes of in-game time, you may make a Meditation roll at +1 difficulty. Any extra successes rolled equal the number of current Psi regained. This benefit requires the Meditation Ability; it cannot be performed as a default task.

If you botch, the number of botches rolled equals current Psi that your character loses. If your character has no Psi points, each botch equals an hour before another recovery roll may be made.

• **Repair [Engineering]:** Hard- and biotech machines are only as flawless as their flawed designers. Before repairing a device that's on the fritz, your character must identify its problems (accomplished as a standard research roll; see below). The Storyteller then sets the difficulty of the repair roll, if any. This difficulty depends on the problems' severity, whether the proper tools or any replacement parts are on hand, and if adverse conditions exist. An inspired research roll may offset these factors somewhat. A simple tire change is a standard action, while rerouting power through a secondary system could be at +1 difficulty or more. Basic repairs take at least a few turns to complete. More complex ones are extended actions that last 10 minutes for each success needed. On a botch, your character may simply waste time and a new part, or may make the problem worse.

• **Research [Academics, Science, Engineering]:** Research is performed when searching computer databases for historical facts, when looking for obscure loopholes in trade laws, or when trying to learn a device's function or origin. In all cases, the number of successes achieved determines the amount of information discovered; one success gives you at least basic information, while extra successes provide more details. The Storyteller may apply difficulties for particularly obscure data. On a botch, your character may not find anything at all or may uncover completely erroneous information.

• **Rest [Meditation]:** Your character can catch up on lost sleep through meditation. Simply roll Meditation at +1 difficulty; each extra success rolled equals one hour of sleep regained. This benefit requires the Meditation Ability; it cannot be performed as a default task.

• **Tracking [Awareness, Survival]:** Unlike shadowing, tracking requires you to follow physical evidence to find a target. Discovering footprints, broken twigs, blood trails or other physical signs lead the tracker right to the subject. Following such a trail is a standard action; multiple successes provide extra information (subject's rate of speed, estimated weight, number of people followed). The quarry can cover his tracks with a successful Survival roll. Each success on a Survival roll modifies any tracking difficulties by +1. Abnormal weather, poor tracking conditions (city streets, starship corridors) and a shortage of time also add to tracking difficulty. On a botch, your character not only loses the trail, but possibly destroys the physical signs of passage.

Social Tests

These systems cover tasks involving the three Social Attributes (Appearance, Manipulation and Charisma). Roleplaying usually supersedes any Social skill roll, for better or worse. Storytellers may ignore the Social systems when a player exhibits particularly good or excruciatingly bad roleplaying.

• **Carousing [Savvy]:** You influence others to relax and have fun. This might include showing a potential client a good time, loosening an informant's tongue or making instant drinking partners who come to your aid when a brawl starts. It's a standard action when dealing with an individual, though difficulties may be added for large (or surly) groups. On a botch, your character comes off as an obnoxious boor, at the least.

• **Credibility [Subterfuge]:** Subterfuge is used when perpetrating a scam or trying to detect one (a scam can range from impersonating the authorities to using a forged shipping manifest). All parties involved, whether detecting the lie or perpetrating it, roll Subterfuge. The scam's "marks" must roll higher than the perpetrator to detect any deception. False credentials and other convincing props may add to the difficulty of uncovering the dupe, while teamwork may help reveal the scam. Remember, computers have advanced security measures, from retinal scanners to advanced agent-identification software. Hacking and/or intrusion rolls may be called for to pull off an inspired scam successfully. If your character perpetrates the scam and you botch, the entire plan falls apart.

• **Disguise [Perform, Style]:** Disguise usually involves two Abilities, although only one may be called for at times. Style is used to copy someone's appearance successfully. The Storyteller may apply difficulties depending on the resources at your character's disposal. A standard roll is suitable if ample visual references of the subject, and appropriate makeup, wig and wardrobe are available. Going by a hologram or having access to a limited wardrobe may be +1 difficulty. Trying a disguise from memory or with little resources could be +3 difficulty. A proper disguise takes

at least 10 minutes to create (the Storyteller may add additional difficulty for such a rush job); an hour or more offers the best results.

To act like someone requires a Perform roll (the Oratory Specialty is useful only to imitate someone's voice, while Acting can be used to imitate someone's mannerisms). It is necessary to study a subject to create a believable disguise. A standard roll is adequate if the subject is in your character's presence for at least an hour (or suitable holofiles are on hand). Working from poor-quality holofiles or rushing things can result in +1 or +2 difficulty. Meeting the subject briefly (or simply faking it) may result in +3 or +4 difficulty.

Aside from these systems, the Storyteller should take into account the player's roleplaying. An adequate disguise roll may still succeed if the player does an impressive imitation, while even the most inspired disguise is ineffectual if the player acts no differently than usual. On a botch, the disguise may be transparent or ridiculous, but is obviously not convincing.

• **Fast-Talk [Subterfuge]:** When there's no time for subtly, baffle them with nonsense. The target can be overwhelmed with a rapid succession of almost-believable half-truths. Hopefully, the subject believes anything he hears just to get away from the babble — or becomes so annoyed that he ignores your character completely. This is a resisted action — your character's Subterfuge against the target's Willpower. Whomever scores more successes wins. On a tie, more babbling is needed. On a botch, your character goes too far, angering the target and rambling without effect.

• **Intimidation [Intimidation, Might]:** Intimidation has two effects. Intimidation's passive effect doesn't involve a roll; it simply gives your character plenty of space — whether on a shuttle, tram or in a bar. The higher your Intimidation Skill Total, the wider the berth that others give her.

Intimidation's active application works through subtlety or outright threat. Subtlety is based on a *perceived* threat (losing one's job, going on report, pain and agony later in life). Roll Intimidation in a resisted action against the subject's Willpower; the target must get more successes or be cowed effectively.

The blatant form of intimidation involves direct physical threat. In this case, you may roll Intimidation or Might (whichever is higher) in a resisted roll against the subject's Willpower. On a botch, your character looks patently ridiculous and doesn't impress anyone in attendance for the rest of the scene.

• **Interrogation [Interrogation]:** Anyone can ask questions. With the Interrogation Ability, you ask questions and have leverage. Interrogating someone peacefully involves asking strategic questions designed to reveal specific facts. This method is a resisted action

between your character's Interrogation and the subject's Willpower. Rolls are made at key points during questioning, probably every few minutes or at the end of an interrogation session.

Violent interrogation involves torturing the victim's mind and/or body until he reveals what he knows. This is a resisted action between your character's Interrogation and the target's Resistance or Willpower (whichever is higher). Rolls are made every minute or turn, depending on the type of torture used. The subject loses a Health Level for every turn of physical torture, or one current Willpower point per turn of mental torture. Damage inflicted depends on the tools used — fire and electricity cause Lethal damage; punches and kicks cause Bashing damage. The combined effect of physical and mental torture has devastating results. A botched Interrogation roll can destroy the subject's body or mind.

Whatever the interrogation method used, if you roll more successes in the resisted action, the target divulges something for each extra success rolled. If your extra successes exceed the victim's Willpower score, he folds completely and reveals everything he knows. The extent and relevancy of shared information are up to the Storyteller (details are often skewed to reflect what the subject knows or by what he thinks his interrogator wants to hear).

• **Oration [Perform]:** From a general's rousing speeches to a politician's slick double-talk, the capacity to sway the masses emotionally creates and destroys empires. When your character speaks to a small board meeting or to a large crowd, roll Perform. The Storyteller may increase the difficulty for a huge, dispassionate or openly hostile audience. Oration is hit or miss — your character either succeeds or fails. On a botch, your character may damage her reputation or even be assaulted by the audience.

• **Performance [Perform]:** Perform can be used to impress an audience or to pay the bills. As with oration, the audience's mood can increase the difficulty, as can the performance's complexity. One success indicates an enjoyable, if uninspired effort, while additional successes make the performance a truly memorable event to even the most surly crowd. On a botch, your character forgets lines or makes a gaffe.

• **Seduction [Savvy, Etiquette, Style, Subterfuge]:** The particular situation and style of the seduction determine which Ability is used. In pleasant, cultured circumstances, roll Etiquette. In a seedy underbelly bar, Savvy is appropriate. Style encompasses any attempt to physically attract an individual or even a group. Roll Subterfuge when your character makes a seduction attempt through exaggeration or fabrication. In all cases, the target rolls Willpower. As long as you get more successes, the target is definitely interested (the degree depends on the number of extra successes rolled). Otherwise, the subject hasn't bitten yet, but you may try again (although at an increased difficulty). On a botch, your character ends up with a drink in his face.

Combat Systems

Combat in **Æon** attempts to capture the drama of violent conflict without downplaying its grim reality. Every effort was made to create a system true to the dynamics, limitations and viciousness of real combat while still leaving room for the unique (and often spectacular) elements that psions bring to it.

The Storyteller should be flexible when arbitrating combat situations; no rules can fully reflect the variety of situations encountered in warfare. If any part of these systems slow the game or cause bickering, don't use them. Combat systems are meant to add depth to the game, not create conflict between the players and the Storyteller.

Types of Combat

There are three types of combat, each involving the same basic system with minor differences:

• **Close Combat:** This covers unarmed combat and melee. Unarmed combat can involve slummers using down-and-dirty tactics or skilled martial arts combatants facing off. Opponents must be within touching distance (one meter) to engage in unarmed combat. Melee involves nonranged weapons, from broken bottles to orbital knives. Opponents must be within one or two meters of each other to engage in melee.

• **Ranged Combat:** Armed combat using projectile weapons — lasers, stunners and slugthrowers. Opponents must normally be within sight (and weapon range) of each other to engage in a firefight.

• **Armored Combat:** Combat between vehicles using mounted weaponry — from skimmers to orbital shuttles to stellar freighters. Opponents must be within weapons range to engage in armored combat (this can vary from dozens of meters for ground vehicles to dozens of kilometers for spacecraft).

Combat Turns

In combat, many things happen at virtually the same time. Since this can make things a bit sticky in a game, combat is divided into a series of roughly three-second intervals called turns. Each of these combat turns has three stages — *Initiative*, *Attack* and *Resolution* — to make it easier to keep track of things.

Describing the Scene

Before each turn, the Storyteller should describe the scene from each character's perspective. Sometimes this will be a wrap-up of the last turn, making what occurred clear to all players. This constant description is essential to avoid confusion.

This is the Storyteller's chance to organize and arrange events so that all goes smoothly when the players interact with the environment he has created. The Storyteller should make his descriptions as interesting as possible, leaving open all sorts of possibilities for characters' actions.

Stage One: Initiative

This stage organizes the turn, and is when you declare your character's action. Various actions are possible — anything from leaping behind a wall to shouting a warning. You must declare what your character does in as much detail as the Storyteller requires.

Everyone rolls a die and adds it to their *Initiatives* [Dexterity + Wits]; the character with the highest result acts first, with the remaining characters acting in decreasing order of result. If two characters get the same total, the one with the higher Initiative rating goes first. If Initiative ratings are also the same, roll again until the tie is resolved.

Although you declare your character's action now (including stating that your character delays her action to see what someone else does), you wait until the *attack* stage to implement that action. At this time, you must also state if any multiple actions will be performed, or if Willpower points will be spent.

All of your character's actions are staged at her rank in the order of initiative. There are only two exceptions to this rule. The first is if your character delays her action, in which case her maneuvers happen when she finally takes action. Your character may act at any time after her designated order in the initiative, even to interrupt another, "slower" character's action. If two characters both delay their actions, and both finally act at the same time, the one with the higher Initiative score for the turn acts first.

The second breach of the initiative order occurs in the case of a defensive action (see **Aborting Actions**, page 241, and **Defensive Maneuvers**, page 242), which your character may perform at any time as long as she has a maneuver left.

Combat Summary Chart

Stage One: Initiative

- Roll Initiative. Everyone declares their actions. The character with the highest Initiative performs her action first. Actions can be delayed to any time later in the order of initiative.
- Declare any multiple actions, reducing Dice Pools accordingly.

Stage Two: Attack

- For unarmed close-combat attacks, roll Brawl or Martial Arts.
- For armed close-combat attacks, roll Melee.
- For ranged (with hand weapons) or armored combat (with vehicles), roll Firearms.
- A character can abort to a defensive action (block, dodge, parry) at any time before her action is performed as long as you make a successful Willpower roll (or a Willpower point is spent).

Stage Three: Resolution

- Determine total damage effect (weapon type or maneuver), adding any extra dice gained from successes on the attack roll.
- Subtract the target's soak (if applicable), then roll remaining damage dice.

Stage Two: Attack

Attacks are the meat of the combat turn. An action's success or failure and potential impact on the target are determined at this stage. You use a certain Ability depending on the type of combat in which your character is engaged:

- **Close Combat:** Use Brawl, Martial Arts or Melee.
- **Ranged Combat:** Use Firearms.
- **Armored Combat:** Use Firearms.

Remember, if your character doesn't have points in the necessary Ability, simply default to the Attribute on which it's based (Strength for Brawl; Dexterity for Melee, Martial Arts and Firearms).

In ranged combat, your weapon may modify your Dice Pool "accuracy" (due to rate of fire, a targeting scope); check the weapon's vital statistics for details. Attacks are usually standard actions, but a difficulty may apply depending on the circumstances of the attack. If you get no successes, the character fails her attack and inflicts no damage. If you botch, not only does the attack fail, but something nasty happens; the weapon jams or explodes, the blade breaks, an ally is hit.

Stage Three: Resolution

During this stage, you determine the damage inflicted by your character's attack, and the Storyteller describes what occurs in the turn. Resolution is a mixture of game and story; it's more interesting for players to hear "Your laser burst blazes into his side; he screams in pain, dropping his gun as he clutches the smoking wound" than simply "Uh, he takes four Health Levels." Attacks and damage are merely ways of describing what happens in the story, and it's important to maintain the narrative of combat even as the dice roll.

Normally, additional successes gained on a skill roll simply mean that you do exceptionally well. *In combat, each extra success you get on an attack roll equals an additional die you add automatically to your damage effect!* This creates fatal and cinematic combat.

Damage Types

All weapons have specific damage ratings, indicating the number of dice that you roll for the attack's damage (called the *damage effect*). Each success on

the damage effect roll inflicts one Health Level of damage on the target. However, the damage applied may be one of two types:

- **Bashing:** Punches and other blunt trauma that are less likely to kill a victim instantly. Characters use their full Stamina ratings to resist Bashing effects, and the damage heals fairly quickly. **Chapter Six: Technology** lists weapon's Bashing attacks with "B," and damage is applied to the Health boxes on your character sheet with "/."
- **Lethal:** Attacks meant to cause immediate and fatal injury to the target. Characters may not use Stamina to resist Lethal effects, and the damage takes quite a while to heal. **Chapter Six: Technology** lists Lethal attacks with "L," and damage is applied to the Health boxes on your character sheet with "X."

Damage effect rolls cannot botch; a botched roll simply means the attack glances harmlessly off the target. Specifics on applying damage effects are described under **Health**, page 250.

Soak

All characters can resist a certain degree of physical punishment; this is called "soaking" damage. Your character's *soak* is based on her Stamina, but can only be used against Bashing damage (this reflects the body's natural resilience to such attacks).

Soak rating is subtracted automatically from your attacker's total damage Dice Pool before it is rolled. Even if your soak is higher than your attacker's damage effect, your opponent *still* rolls one die.

Your character cannot use Stamina to soak Lethal damage due to the brutal and invasive nature of such attacks. The human body can endure some abuse, but it's not capable of dealing with a bullet's traumatic impact or a laser's searing intensity.

Although your character's natural soak works only against Bashing damage, armor may give her a soak against Bashing and/or Lethal effects (see **Armor**, below). Some psi powers may also provide a soak against Lethal effects (or may add to a Bashing soak).

Armor

Simply put, armor adds to your character's soak. The armor's rating combines with your base soak for purposes of reducing damage. Light armor offers a small amount of protection, but doesn't hinder mobility. Heavy armor provides a lot of protection, but can restrict flexibility. Some armor is designed to shield against Bashing effects, some against Lethal — and some protects against both.

Armor is not indestructible. If the damage rolled in a single attack equals twice the armor's rating, the armor is destroyed.

Armor types, their ratings and other specifics are described in **Chapter Six: Technology** (page 266).

Optional Rule: Lethal Soak

The human body isn't designed to withstand the brutal physical trauma inflicted by gunshots and knife wounds. It can be argued, though, that some people are better able to withstand these effects than others are. A hardy, physically fit person is more likely to survive being shot than a frail, weak person is.

You therefore have the option to introduce a Lethal soak to your game (the Storyteller is final arbiter on whether the rule is used). Lethal soak lends naturally tough characters some degree of protection based on their Stamina ratings. Your character has a base soak against Lethal damage as indicated on the chart below. The soak functions just like a natural Bashing soak, except that it applies to Lethal damage.

Stamina Rating	Base Lethal Soak
One	Zero
Two	One
Three	One
Four	Two
Five	Two

Personal Combat

These maneuvers give you a variety of choices in combat. Roleplaying combat is more entertaining if you can visualize your character's moves instead of simply rolling dice.

General Maneuvers

- **Aborting Actions:** You can abandon your character's declared action to a defensive action as long as your character hasn't acted in the turn. Actions that can be aborted to include block, dodge and parry. A successful Willpower roll (or the expenditure of a Willpower point) is required for a character to abort an action and perform a defensive one instead. (See **Defensive Maneuvers**, page 242, for descriptions of block, dodge and parry.)
- **Ambush:** Ambushes involve surprising a target to get in a decisive first strike. The attacker rolls Stealth in a resisted action against the target's Awareness. If the attacker gets more successes, she can stage one free attack on the target and adds any extra successes from the resisted roll to her attack roll. On a tie, the attacker still attacks, although the target may perform a defensive maneuver. If the defender gets more successes, he spots the ambush, and both parties roll Initiative normally. Targets already involved in combat cannot be ambushed.

• **Blind Fighting/Fire:** Staging attacks while blind usually incurs a +2 difficulty. The Ability Specialties Blind Fighting and Blind Fire reduce that penalty. Specialties normally add a die to the rolls that they apply to. Blind Fighting and Blind Fire reduce the penalties imposed by fighting without seeing by one; all difficulties for being in pitch darkness or for being flashed by bright light are reduced to +1.

• **Flank and Rear Attacks:** Characters attacking targets from the flank gain an additional die to accuracy, and two additional dice to accuracy when attacking from behind.

• **Movement:** A character may move half of her running distance [Dexterity +12 meters] and still take an action in a turn. Other maneuvers such as leaping or tumbling may be considered separate actions, depending on their complexity.

• **Multiple Actions:** If you declare multiple actions, subtract dice from the first Dice Pool equal to the total number of actions taken. Each subsequent action loses an additional die (cumulative). If a character performs *only* an abort action in a turn, use the appropriate block, dodge or parry system.

• **Targeting:** Aiming for a specific location incurs a difficulty, but can bypass armor or cover, or can result in an increased damage effect. The Storyteller should consider special results beyond a simple increase in damage, depending on the attack and the target.

Target Size	Difficulty	Damage Effect
Medium (limb, briefcase)	+1	No modifier
Small (hand, head, computer)	+2	+2
Precise (eye, groin, lock)	+3	+4

• **Two Weapons:** Using two weapons gives the attacker a distinct advantage, but has its share of complications. Doing so is considered performing a multiple action, complete with reduced Dice Pools for total attacks taken. Additionally, the attacker suffers +1 difficulty for her off-hand (unless she's ambidextrous in which case she ignores the penalty).

Pistols, carbines and other small arms incur no further penalties. However, wielding a sidearm and a heavy weapon requires a minimum 4 Might Skill Total; using two heavy weapons at once requires a minimum 6 Might Skill Total (default to Strength). Each point the attacker is under this minimum is an additional difficulty applied to each shot. The attacker can fire a number of shots up to each weapon's rate of fire.

Defensive Maneuvers

It's a given that your character tries to avoid being hit in combat — that's why everyone makes attack rolls. Sometimes all your character wants to do is avoid attacks. You may announce a *defensive action* at any time before your character's opponent makes an attack roll, and as long as your character has an action left to perform. You

can declare a defensive action on your character's turn in the initiative or can even *abort* to a defensive maneuver. You must make a successful Willpower roll (or may simply spend one point of Willpower) to abort. If the Willpower roll fails, your character must carry out the action that you declared originally.

There are three types of defensive actions: block, dodge and parry. Your character can defend against virtually any kind of attack with these three maneuvers. However, your character may not be able to avoid every single attack that's directed at her. She can't dodge when there's no room to maneuver, and she can't block or parry if she doesn't know an attack is coming.

Each defensive maneuver uses the same basic system: The defensive action is a resisted roll against the opponent's attack roll. Unless the attacker gets more total successes, he misses. If the attacker gets more successes, those that he achieves in excess of the defender's successes, if any, are used to hit (the attacker doesn't necessarily use *all* the successes he rolled). So even if the defender has fewer successes than the attacker does, the defender's maneuver can still reduce the effectiveness of the attack, even if the maneuver can't counteract it completely.

- **Block:** A Brawl or Martial Arts maneuver using your character's own body to deflect a hand-to-hand Bashing attack. Lethal attacks cannot be blocked unless the defender has a psi power or armor that provides special protection.
- **Dodge:** An Athletics or Martial Arts maneuver useful for avoiding attacks of all types. Your character bobs and weaves to avoid Melee or Brawl attacks (if there's no room to maneuver, she must block or parry instead). In firefights, your character moves at least one meter and ends up behind cover (if there's no room to maneuver and/or no cover available, she can drop to the ground). If your character remains under cover or prone thereafter, cover rules apply against further Firearms attacks (see **Cover**, page 245).
- **Parry:** A Melee maneuver using a weapon to block a Brawl or Melee attack. If a character makes a Brawl attack and the defender parries with a weapon that normally causes Lethal damage effects, the attacker can actually be hurt by a successful parry. If the defender rolls more successes than the attacker does in the resisted action, the defender rolls the weapon's base damage plus the parry's extra successes against the attacker as automatic damage.

Block, dodge and parry can be performed as part of a multiple action in your character's turn (punching then blocking, shooting then dodging, parrying then striking). Using a multiple action to act and defend is advantageous because your character can still accomplish something in a turn besides avoiding attacks.

For Example: *Hiroko Foster wants to punch a thug, and then be ready to dodge two attacks — a multiple action. This is considered three separate actions using her 5 Martial Arts for the punch, and her 6 Athletics two separate times for dodging. The punch is reduced by three dice (giving her two dice in her Dice Pool) because Hiroko performs three actions. The first dodge is reduced by four dice (for another Dice Pool of two) as per the multiple-action rules. The final dodge is reduced by five dice (leaving one die).*

Rather than make defensive maneuvers a part of a multiple action, you may declare that your character spends an entire turn defending. The multiple-action rules are not used in this case. Instead, you have a full Dice Pool for the first defensive action, but lose one die, cumulatively, for each subsequent defense action made in the same turn. It is difficult to avoid several incoming attacks.

For Example: *Hiroko spends a whole turn dodging. With a 6 Athletics Skill Total, she can dodge up to six attacks. Hiroko's player rolls six dice against the first attack, five dice against the second, four dice against the third, three dice against the fourth, two dice against the fifth and a single die against the sixth attack. Hiroko can't do anything else that turn but dodge.*

Maneuver Characteristics

Maneuvers with specific combat effects may modify your attack roll, difficulty or damage effect.

Ability: The Trait used for the action taken. If your character doesn't have a rating in the Ability, default to its base Attribute.

Accuracy: The dice added to the roll to hit an opponent. A "+3" adds three dice to the Dice Pool for that attack.

Difficulty: The added successes beyond the base one needed to accomplish the action. A "+2" difficulty means you need a total of three successes.

Damage: The modifier to the damage Dice Pool. A "+1" means you add one die when rolling the damage effect.

Close Combat Maneuvers

This is simply a listing of the common maneuvers used in close combat; feel free to develop your own moves (with the Storyteller's approval). All hand-to-hand attacks inflict Bashing damage unless stated otherwise. The damage inflicted by melee attacks depends on the weapon type (see the **Melee Weapons Chart**, page 261).

Difficulty and damage for these maneuvers may be modified at the Storyteller's discretion, depending on the combat style the character uses. As always, drama and excitement take precedence over rules systems.

• **Clinch:** On a successful attack roll, the attacker goes into a clinch with the target. In the first turn, the attacker may roll Strength +2 damage effect. In each subsequent turn, combatants act on their orders in the initiative. A combatant can inflict another Strength +2 damage effect automatically, or attempt to escape the clinch. No other actions are allowed until one combatant breaks free. To escape a clinch, make a resisted Brawl or Martial Arts roll against the opponent. If the escaping character rolls more successes, she breaks free; if not, the characters continue to grapple in the next turn.
Ability: Brawl or Martial Arts **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +2

• **Disarm:** To knock a weapon from an opponent's hand, the attacker rolls at +1 difficulty; if the attacker is unarmed, she rolls at +2 difficulty. If successful, the attacker rolls damage normally. If successes rolled exceed the opponent's Strength score, the opponent takes no damage but is disarmed. A botch usually means the attacker drops her own weapon or is struck by her target's weapon.
Ability: Martial Arts or Melee **Difficulty:** Special
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Special

• **Hold:** This attack inflicts no damage, as the intent is to immobilize rather than injure the subject. On a successful roll, the attacker holds the target until the subject's next action. At that time, both combatants roll resisted Brawl or Martial Arts actions; the subject remains immobilized (able to take no other action) until she rolls more successes than the attacker does.
Ability: Brawl or Martial Arts **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** None

• **Kick:** Kicks range from simple front kicks to aerial spins. The base attack is +1 difficulty and inflicts the attacker's Strength +3 in damage. These ratings may be modified further at the Storyteller's discretion, increasing in damage and/or difficulty as the maneuver increases in complexity.
Ability: Brawl or Martial Arts **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +3

• **Multiple Opponents:** A character who battles multiple opponents in close combat suffers attack and defense difficulties of +1, cumulative, for each opponent after the first (to a maximum of +4).

• **Strike:** The attacker lashes out with a fist. The base attack is a standard action and inflicts the character's Strength +2 in damage. The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty and/or damage depending on the type of punch: hook, jab, haymaker, karate strike.
Ability: Brawl or Martial Arts **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +2

• **Sweep:** The attacker uses her own legs to knock the legs out from under her opponent. The target takes Strength +1 damage and must roll Athletics at +3 difficulty or suffer a knockdown (see **Maneuver Complications**, page 246).

The attacker can also use a staff, chain or similar implement to perform a sweep. The effect is the same, although the target takes Strength + Weapon type damage.

Ability: Martial Arts or Melee **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Special

• **Tackle:** The attacker rushes her opponent, tackling him to the ground. The attack roll is +1 difficulty and inflicts Strength +3 damage. Additionally, both combatants must roll Athletics at +2 difficulty or suffer a knockdown (see **Maneuver Complications**, page 246). Even if the target's Athletics roll succeeds, he is unbalanced, suffering +1 difficulty to his actions for the next turn.

Ability: Brawl **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +3

• **Throw:** The attacker grabs her opponent at +1 difficulty to hit, and uses the target's own momentum to throw him. The target is launched a number of meters equal to the attacker's Strength (opponents with a lot of momentum may travel up to an extra two meters). The target suffers a knockdown (see **Maneuver Complications**, page 246) automatically, and takes Strength +1 damage with an additional die of damage for every two meters he was thrown (rounded down). Landing on harmful objects or debris can increase the damage effect.

Ability: Brawl or Martial Arts **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Special

• **Weapon Strike:** A slashing blow, thrust or jab, depending on the weapon used.

Ability: Melee **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength + Weapon type

Ranged Combat Maneuvers

Most physical conflicts involve ranged weapons at some point. The following maneuvers allow for a number of useful actions during a firefight, but don't feel limited by this list. If the need arises, try developing a new maneuver (at the Storyteller's discretion). Most ranged weapons inflict Lethal damage. Refer to the **Ranged Weapons Chart**, page 264, for specific information.

• **Aiming:** The attacker adds one die up to her total Perception rating to her accuracy on a single shot for each turn spent aiming. A scope adds two more dice to the attacker's pool in the first turn of aiming (in addition to those added for Perception). The attacker may do nothing but aim during this time. Additionally, it isn't possible to aim at a target that is moving faster than a walk.

• **Automatic Fire:** The weapon unloads its entire ammunition clip in one attack against a single target. The attacker makes a single roll, adding 10 dice to her accuracy. However, the attack roll is +2 difficulty due to the weapon's recoil. Extra successes add to the damage effect.

This attack is permissible only if the weapon's clip is at least half-full to begin with. Also, full-auto is possible only with "slugthrowers" (i.e., conventional arms or coilguns). Full-auto causes energy-projecting weapons to overheat and explode; all lasers have built-in safeguards that prevent automatic fire.

Ability: Firearms **Difficulty:** +2
Accuracy: +10 **Damage:** Special

• **Cover:** Cover increases an attacker's difficulty to hit a target (and often the target's ability to fire back). The difficulties listed below are the extra number of successes that the attacker needs to hit a target under cover. A character who fires back from behind cover is also at something of a disadvantage to hit as he exposes himself and ducks back under protection. Firearms attacks made by a defender who is under cover are at one lower difficulty than listed below. (If a listed difficulty is +1, then the defender suffers no penalty to make attacks from under that cover.) If your character hides behind a wall, attackers' Firearms rolls have a +2 difficulty. Your character's attacks staged from behind that wall are at +1 difficulty.

Note that difficulties for combatants who are both under cover are cumulative. If one combatant is prone and one is behind a wall, attacks staged by the prone character are at +2 difficulty, while attacks staged by the character behind the wall are also at +2 difficulty.

Cover Type	Attacker Difficulty
Light (lying prone)	+1
Good (behind wall)	+2
Superior (only head exposed)	+3

• **Cover Fire:** This maneuver isn't meant to hit targets; it is used instead to force opponents to dive for cover (allowing attackers to advance, withdraw or perform some other strategic action). Cover fire is a resisted action between the attacker's Firearms and each opponent's Willpower. Each opponent who gets fewer successes than the attacker does abandons any planned action and dives for cover automatically, losing any further actions that turn. If an opponent's successes tie the attacker's, the opponent perseveres, but takes his next action at a base +1 difficulty. If an opponent gets more successes, he steels his nerve and endures the volley. If an opponent botches, he's struck by a shot and takes the weapon's base damage.

• **Multiple Shots:** An attacker may take more than one shot in a turn by declaring a multiple action (the first shot's Dice Pool is reduced by the total number of shots fired, and each subsequent shot is reduced by an additional die, cumulative). The attacker can fire a number of shots up to the weapon's full rate of fire.

Ability: Firearms **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Special **Damage:** Weapon type

• **Range:** The **Ranged Weapons Chart** (page 264) lists each weapon's medium range; no modifiers apply when shooting at this range. Twice that listing is the weapon's maximum range. Attacks made up to maximum range are +2 difficulty. Attacks made at targets within two meters are considered *point blank*. Point-

blank shots add two dice to the attacker's accuracy.

• **Reloading:** Reloading takes one full turn and requires the character's concentration (like any other maneuver, reloading can be performed as part of a multiple action; no die roll is required to reload, but doing so counts as an action for reducing other die rolls in a turn).

• **Semi-Automatic Burst:** The attacker gains two additional dice on a single attack roll, and expends three shots from the weapon's clip. Only one burst may be fired each turn. All firearms may perform this maneuver, although conventional arms and coilguns are +1 difficulty on the attack due to recoil.

Ability: Firearms **Difficulty:** Special
Accuracy: +2 **Damage:** Weapon type

• **Spray:** While energy weapons cannot fire full-auto and cannot strafe (see below), they can be set to "spray." The weapon emits a steady stream of energy, not unlike a fire hose, which is swept over an area. This energy spray functions like strafing, adding 10 dice to a standard attack roll, with a +1 difficulty for each meter in area of effect covered beyond the first. This option drains the weapon's charge completely.

The energy spray degrades to a low intensity automatically to prevent overloading. As a result, damage is reduced by two dice. Successes are divided up just as in strafing and applied to the damage effect.

Dodge rolls against an energy spray are +1 difficulty.

Ability: Firearms **Difficulty:** Special
Accuracy: +10 **Damage:** Special

• **Strafing:** Instead of aiming at one target, full-automatic weapons can be fired across an area. Strafing adds 10 dice to accuracy on a standard attack roll, and empties the clip. A +1 difficulty (in addition to any other modifiers) is added for each meter in area of effect covered beyond the first.

The attacker divides any successes gained on the attack roll evenly among all targets in the covered area (successes assigned to hit an individual are added to that target's damage effect, as well). If only one target is within range or the area of effect, only half the successes affect him. The attacker then assigns any leftover successes as she desires. If fewer successes are rolled than there are targets, only one may be assigned per target until they are all allocated.

Dodge rolls against strafing are at +1 difficulty.

Ability: Firearms **Difficulty:** Special
Accuracy: +10 **Damage:** Special

Maneuver Complications

The following are some of the common types of combat complications. The Storyteller should add any others as the situation warrants (see **Sources of Injury**, page 254, for further information).

• **Blinded:** Add two dice to attack rolls made on a blinded target. Furthermore, blind characters are at +2 difficulty on all actions.

• **Dazed:** If, in a single attack, the attacker rolls a number of successes greater than the target's Stamina, the victim is dazed. The target must spend her next available turn shaking off the attack's effects. Also, see **Unconscious**, below.

• **Immobilization:** Add two dice to attack rolls made on an immobilized (i.e., held by someone or something) but still struggling target. Attacks hit automatically if the target is completely immobilized (tied up or otherwise paralyzed).

• **Knockdown:** Quite simply, the victim falls down. After suffering a knockdown, the subject makes an Athletics or Martial Arts roll. If successful, she gets back on her feet immediately, but her Initiative is reduced by two in the next turn. On a failed roll, the subject spends her next action climbing to her feet. On a botch, she lands particularly hard or at a severe angle; the Storyteller rolls a Bashing damage effect equal to the botches rolled.

Maneuvers like tackle, throw and sweep are intended to knock an opponent down. However, an especially powerful attack of any kind may send the target to the ground. Such instances are best left to the Storyteller's discretion, and should occur only when appropriately cinematic or suitable to the story.

• **Unconscious:** If, in a single attack, the attacker rolls a number of successes greater than the target's Stamina plus two, the victim blacks out. Unconsciousness lasts from five turns to an entire scene (specific duration is at the Storyteller's discretion).

Firefights in Play

For Example: *Chei Leung and Hiroko Foster have a difference of opinion. Both players roll Initiative; Chei Leung gets a 12, Hiroko gets a 10. Chei Leung fires his laser (5 Firearms for 3, 5, 5, 8 and 8), striking Hiroko with one extra success. The laser does five dice Lethal damage plus one die for the extra success on the roll to hit. After subtracting the 2 Lethal Armor rating of Hiroko's reinforced clothing, Chei Leung's player rolls four damage dice and gets 2, 6, 6 and 0. Hiroko loses one Lethal Health Level.*

Hiroko splits her action between leaping behind cover (using 6 Athletics) and firing a semi-automatic burst (using 6 Firearms). Two actions mean the leap roll is reduced by two dice. Hiroko's player rolls 2, 5, 8 and 9. Hiroko jumps around a corner and shoots at Chei Leung from cover (giving her +1 difficulty). Hiroko's Dice Pool is reduced by three on her second action, but firing a semi-auto burst adds two dice. This gives Hiroko's player five dice, and she gets 1, 4, 6, 9 and 9. She needed at least two successes to hit due to shooting from behind cover, so Hiroko just hits. Her laser does five dice Lethal damage, which is reduced to only two dice by Chei Leung's 3 Lethal Armor. Hiroko's player rolls damage, getting 2 and 3, and causes no injury. Hiroko's player grimaces, but hopes that cover will give her character an advantage in the next turn.

Close Combat Maneuvers Table

Maneuver	Ability	Accuracy	Difficulty	Damage
Block	Brawl, Martial Arts	Special	Normal	0
Clinch	Brawl, Martial Arts	Normal	Normal	Special
Disarm	Martial Arts, Melee	Normal	Special	Special
Dodge	Athletics, Martial Arts	0	Special	0
Hold	Brawl, Martial Arts	Normal	Normal	0
Kick	Brawl, Martial Arts	Normal	+1	Strength +3
Parry	Melee	Special	Normal	0
Strike	Brawl, Martial Arts	Normal	Normal	Strength +2
Sweep	Martial Arts, Melee	Normal	Normal	Special
Tackle	Brawl	Normal	+1	Strength +3
Throw	Brawl, Martial Arts	Normal	+1	Special
Two Weapons	Melee	Special	Special	Strength + Weapon
Weapon Strike	Melee	Normal	Normal	Strength + Weapon

Ranged Combat Maneuvers Table

Maneuver	Ability	Accuracy	Difficulty	Damage
Automatic Fire	Firearms	+10	+2	Special
Multiple Shots	Firearms	Special	Normal	Weapon
Semi-Auto Burst	Firearms	+2	Special	Weapon
Spray	Firearms	+10	Special	Special
Strafing	Firearms	+10	Special	Special
Two Weapons	Firearms	Special	Special	Weapon

Armored Combat

Vehicle combat systems differ from those of personal combat in only two ways: damage effect and maneuvers. The weaponry involved in vehicle combat does a significantly higher amount of damage, and the character directs a craft's maneuvers instead of performing them herself. Otherwise, initiative, attacks and resolution are handled in the same way as in personal combat.

Damage and Armor Adds

Vehicle weapons are designed to deal significant damage to vehicles and other durable structures (buildings, orbital stations). A craft can also take more punishment than a person can. Essentially, people and vehicles fight on different scales. To reflect this, vehicle armament has *damage adds*, while vehicles have *armor adds*. A damage add is listed in brackets next to a weapon's damage effect (e.g., 5d10 [10] L), while an armor add is bracketed after the vehicle's soak (e.g., 4 [10]). Also, armor adds are applied against both Bashing and Lethal damage.

Adds are used only when vehicle weapons fire on people or when small arms fire at craft. If a person is hit with artillery fire, the add is the number of damage successes inflicted automatically (in virtually all cases, this results in immediate death). If a personal weapon is fired at a vehicle, the soak add is the number of dice subtracted from the weapon's damage effect. (Unlike a normal soak, if this reduction brings the attack's Dice Pool to zero, no damage roll is made and no damage is inflicted).

When a vehicle weapon fires on another vehicle, the damage and armor adds are ignored. Instead, the weapon's base damage effect and the craft's base soak are rolled normally. This reflects that artillery and armor are specifically designed to inflict and resist huge amounts of punishment, and people aren't — while still keeping Dice Pools to manageable totals.

The damage in vehicle combat is applied just like in personal combat. While the systems are identical, a damaged ship isn't the same as a damaged person. Refer to **Chapter Six: Technology**, page 279, for specifics on vehicle weapons and applying damage to vehicles.

Vehicle Maneuvers

Vehicles can perform a selection of maneuvers; dice actions usually come into play when the pilot is either closing on or avoiding another craft. Ground vehicles use the Drive Ability and may only perform spin and turn maneuvers. Atmospheric craft use the Pilot Ability and may perform all but space maneuvers. Spacecraft use the Pilot

Ability and may perform any type of maneuver listed. New maneuvers can be added with the Storyteller's permission.

All

• **Spin:** If traveling at no greater than one-half speed, the vehicle can rotate directly on its axis. The craft can turn around or even spin in a complete circle. Spacecraft, helicopters, ducted-fan craft, hovercraft and tracked vehicles may perform this maneuver. Conventional fixed-wing aircraft, wheeled vehicles and aquatic craft cannot change direction without covering distance, and must make a Turn (as noted below).

• **Turn:** Anything from a casual left to a severe swerve or U-turn. The Storyteller may assign difficulties depending on the sharpness of the turn.

Atmospheric

• **Climb:** The character pilots the craft up. This can range from a slow climb to a sharp-angled ascent. The Storyteller may apply a +1 or +2 difficulty for a sharp climb, since such a maneuver involves high g-forces.

• **Dive:** The opposite of a climb; the character pilots the craft downward. The Storyteller may apply a difficulty to the Pilot roll for a hard dive due to g-force stresses, as with a sharp climb.

• **Loop:** The character steers the craft in a vertical loop, ending up in roughly the same position that he started in at the beginning of the move. Difficulty depends on the loop's tightness, usually between +1 and +3.

• **Roll:** The craft flips upside down (and usually right-side up again). Repeated rolls are possible (a "corkscrew") with increasing difficulty, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Space

• **Match V:** "V" stands for both velocity and vector; the craft matches speed and direction with another object. The difficulty depends on the opposing craft's maneuvers. It's a standard roll if the ships' pilots cooperate, but if one of them performs evasive maneuvers, the Storyteller may apply +1 to +3 difficulty to matching maneuvers.

• **Z-pattern:** The ship fires thrusters in a random pattern to throw off pursuers or to avoid target locks. The maneuver is +1 difficulty due to the centripetal force involved, but anyone trying to follow or fire on the ship suffers +2 difficulty on Pilot or Firearms rolls.

Space Flight — A Primer

Maneuvering effectively in space takes skill. There are a number of variables involved in this process (most of which are handled by a craft's navigation system), but the basic theory is relatively straightforward.

All spacecraft are equipped with a main propulsion engine and multidirectional thrusters. The main engine is used primarily for atmospheric and long-range

space travel. The rudders and flaps that are so useful in an atmosphere have no effect in space. Thrusters handle the majority of space maneuvering.

When the pilot fires aft thrusters, the ship moves in a straight line in the direction in which the nose points (this is referred to as the ship's vector of motion). As long as the pilot maintains thrust, the ship continues to accelerate to maximum speed. The highest speeds that ships can travel at are determined by engine capacity, ship structural integrity and the laws of physics (see **Chapter Six: Technology**, page 284, for more information on ships speeds). When the pilot cuts off the thrusters, the craft still maintains its previous speed and straight-line course.

For Example: *Linsey Marsden fires his Locust fighter's aft engine for a few seconds until the ship reaches a velocity of 300 km/h. When Marsden releases the thruster controls, the Locust continues traveling straight ahead at 300 km/h.*

To change speed, the pilot fires a thruster again. Activating the aft thruster increases the craft's forward velocity. If thrust is fired in the direction exactly opposite of the ship's vector of motion, the craft slows. Stopping involves expending exactly the right amount of thrust to counteract the ship's velocity. Spacecraft have advanced navigation systems that are more than capable of synchronizing thrusters for these otherwise difficult maneuvers.

For Example: *Marsden hits the aft thruster again, goosing the craft up to 500 km/h. When he nears the Legion landing platform, Marsden fires the forward thruster, watching the velocity indicator until it reads zero. The fighter floats a kilometer over the platform, drifting perhaps a few centimeters per hour relative to the Lunar site.*

Changing direction involves adjusting the ship's attitude with multidirectional thrusters and then firing the primary engine. No matter what direction a craft is traveling in, when the nose is pointed in a different direction and the aft engine fires, the ship's vector changes to the new direction. Attitude can be changed to any direction that a pilot desires without altering the ship's current vector of motion. It's only when aft thrusters fire at a new attitude that direction of travel changes.

Since a spacecraft moves by vector motion, it doesn't generally assume a curved flight path in a vacuum. The only way to achieve "curved" flight is to apply constant "side" and aft thrust. When the pilot releases the thrust controls, the ship continues in a straight line.

A fast and efficient method of maneuvering involves firing aft thrusters, pivoting and firing more bursts of aft thrust. These actions allow for high-speed and quickly performed moves, but are limited by the pilot's physical capabilities and the ship's safety restrictions. See **Chapter Six: Technology**, page 283, for vital ship components.

For Example: *Marsden could swoop down to the landing platform, but while a curved dive is visually elegant, it wastes time and power. Instead, Marsden pivots the Locust so that its nose points toward the platform, then fires the aft thruster. The craft shoots toward the landing site, and Marsden activates the forward thrusters gradually until the ship is a few meters above the surface. A swivel of the nose and a burst from the landing thrusters sets the Locust down gently on the landing pad.*

Maneuvering in Space

A good pilot has an intuitive sense for exactly how the amount and direction of thrust affects vector, and for her own relative position in space, where there are likely few, if any, reference points.

It's vital for a pilot to know exactly how much centripetal stress she can endure from severe vector changes. Being able to pull tight maneuvers without losing control or blacking out allows a good pilot to lock weapons on a target while avoiding laser and missile fire.

A pilot must also avoid other craft and debris at all times, but use them to her advantage whenever possible. The pilot must be able to ignore her ship's collision-warning systems just long enough to use debris as a missile decoy, or to get a solid lock on a pinpoint target.

Clumsy maneuvers can be lethal. A pilot who underthrusts her ship can give her enemy the upper hand, as she doesn't maneuver quickly enough to avoid a weapons lock. A ship's fail-safes can kick in on a red-line vector change, triggering a low-stress turn instead of the hard one needed to avoid a collision. Too many hasty vector shifts can send a ship tumbling out of control. (Most ships have computer-controlled attitude stabilizers, but they don't always activate as quickly as a pilot in combat needs them to).

In the end, a good space pilot must be able to balance finesse with power — or she won't be a pilot for very long.

Space Combat

Few defensive orbital platforms still exist around Earth given the stigma they gained during the Aberrant War. The defense platforms of the 22nd century are manned and heavily armed craft that remain in orbit around stations and other inhabited planets. Various governments' fighters and frigates also patrol the vast intrasolar spacelanes routinely, alert for not only Aberrants but for pirates and opposing government forces.

While patrol craft are largely automated, they are still manned and operated by human crews. Computer systems handle most details of astrogation and combat, but a human presence is vital. A ship's pilot monitors systems and initiates key maneuvers (using Pilot). Most fighters

have a gunner who tracks targets and triggers missile or laser fire (using Firearms), while a pilot concentrates on directing a craft. Frigate- and freighter-class ships operate in essentially the same ways, although specific job duties are often assigned to a number of crew members instead of just one, as on a fighter.

Space combat, although distinct from old atmospheric dogfights, is deadly. Spacecraft don't lock onto opponents' tails as atmospheric craft do. A space pilot tries to predict her enemy's maneuvers, hoping that she'll end up in the perfect position to fire before her opponent does. A craft may match speed and vector with an opponent, and then pivot to blast at the right moment. A ship could shoot off on an oblique vector, gauging thrust to intersect with an enemy craft in time to spin and strafe. Of course, the enemy craft makes things difficult by trying to do exactly the same thing.

Spacecraft change trajectory, attitude and speed with pinpoint precision by using thrusters. A "smart missile" tracks down a ship hundreds of kilometers away, and that ship's lasers lance into space to detonate the incoming missile before it can strike its target. In space combat, opposing craft spin like tops and trace evasive geometric patterns as they trade deadly missile volleys and laser salvos across hundreds of kilometers.

For Example: *A Chinese fighter lucks across a UAN freebooter in the asteroid belt. Each ship's sensors identifies the other from a few kilometers away. Both ship's players roll Initiative; the Chinese fighter gets a 12; the UAN craft gets a 10. The fighter goes for a straight attack, firing its heavy laser cannon (total 6 Firearms for 3, 4, 5, 5, 8 and 8), striking the UAN pirate with one extra success. The laser has an eight dice Lethal damage effect against vehicles and gets an additional die for the extra success rolled. However, this pool is reduced by the other ship's 3 [10] Lethal Armor rating. The Chinese fighter's player rolls six dice and gets 1, 2, 3, 6, 6 and 0. The UAN craft takes one point of structural damage.*

The pirate splits his action between firing thrusters to vector behind an asteroid (6 Pilot) and shooting a missile (8 Firearms). Two actions mean the piloting maneuver is reduced by two dice. The pilot's player rolls 2, 5, 8 and 9. The shuttle zigs behind the asteroid, firing retrothrusters to come to a stop. The pilot shoots a missile on his second action (at +1 difficulty since the asteroid interferes with the tracking sensors, as per the cover fire rules). The UAN pilot's Dice Pool is reduced by three on his second action, but smart missiles add three dice to accuracy. This gives the pilot's player eight dice, and he gets 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 9, 9 and 0. He needs at least two successes, and the pilot gets two extra successes to add to the missile's base 10 dice Lethal damage. After subtracting the Chinese fighter's 4 [5] Lethal Armor soak, the player rolls eight dice damage. He gets 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 8, 0 and 0, and the Chinese craft rocks under the impact.

Maneuvering and countermaneuvering can go on for some time between two craft, which is when a wingman, an allied pilot in another craft, is useful. Coordinating maneuvers between two allied craft brings an enemy ship into one of the craft's line of fire relatively quickly. Only the absolute best solo pilots can hope to win a two-on-one fight.

Health

This section deals with your character's current physical or mental state, and various factors that can improve or worsen these conditions. Health can be affected by anything that injures the body or the mind, such as simple lack of sleep, psionic assault or a bullet to the head. Depending on her condition, a psion's current health can greatly impede her ability to perform even the simplest of tasks.

Physical States

The 22nd century has seen innumerable advances in medicine. On the whole, people are healthier and live longer than ever before. As humanity ventures further into the stars, the medical sciences strive to keep pace with the injuries and diseases that arise with such expansion.

The Health Chart

The Health chart on the character sheet helps you track your character's current physical condition. It also lists the penalty imposed on your Dice Pool for each level of injury that your character sustains. As your character suffers more injuries, her health declines until she becomes incapacitated — or dead.

Every character has eight Health Levels, ranging from Bruised to Dead. There are really nine levels, the top being fully healthy, but it's unnecessary to include that on a health chart. When an attacker rolls a success on a damage effect, your character takes one Health Level of damage. This is marked on your character sheet in the appropriate box, although the mark you make depends on the type of damage inflicted (see **Applying Damage**, below).

The number to the left of the lowest marked box indicates your current dice penalty. As your character gets more and more battered, it's increasingly difficult for him to perform even the simplest of tasks. The dice penalty is subtracted from your Dice Pool for every action (except damage effect and soak) until the wound heals.

The penalty also indicates impaired movement, translating into the number of meters by which your movement is divided. Furthermore, at Wounded and below, your character can no longer sprint. A character with a 3 Dexterity who's at Maimed can therefore walk only two meters a turn, or can run four meters. At Crippled, your character can only walk (or crawl) one meter per turn.

Health Level	Dice/Move Penalty	Description
Bruised	0	You're slightly battered, suffering no penalties.
Hurt	-1	Some scrapes and bumps;

		not seriously impaired.
Injured	-1	Minor injuries; noticeable damage.
Wounded	-2	You can walk and run, but cannot sprint.
Maimed	-3	A bloody mess, you hobble about in pain.
Crippled	-4	You're severely injured, stumbling and wrecked.
Incapacitated		You lose consciousness from the pain and trauma. No actions are possible (see below).
Dead		Simply that. Notify the next of kin (see below).

• **Incapacitated:** The stage immediately before Death, Incapacitated differs from unconsciousness in that your character collapses from the combined effects of physical trauma and pain. She falls to the ground and remains comatose until her Health recovers to Wounded. Successful medical treatment that restores at least one Health Level can bring her around before this. Any more damage suffered by an Incapacitated character kills her.

• **Dead:** When your character suffers a total of eight levels of Lethal damage, she dies. Medicine being what it is in the 22nd century, a trained professional has a brief amount of time to resuscitate her. Your character is beyond help after a number of turns equal to her total Endurance.

Optional Rule: Extras

To make large fights cinematic and easy to manage, assign "extra" Storyteller characters only four Health Levels [Hurt -1, Maimed -3, Incapacitated and Dead]. Extras are nameless thugs whom characters run into from time to time, not key Storyteller characters. They're diversions who are usually controlled by the more important enemies and villains whom your characters are really after. These extras are a plot device and shouldn't interfere with the main story. After taking a few lumps, extras retreat, surrender or fall over so the real action can get underway.

Applying Damage

There are two damage types in **Æon**. Bashing damage includes all forms of temporary injury. Lethal damage covers permanent, killing wounds. All injuries are cumulative, whether Lethal or Bashing, and the combined injury determines your character's current Health Level. Specifics on each type of damage are provided below.

When your character takes Bashing damage, it's recorded as a slash ("/") in the appropriate Health chart box.

HEALTH		
Bruised	-0	☒
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Maimed	-3	☐
Crippled	-4	☐
Incapacitated		☐
Dead		☐

Lethal damage is marked with "X" for each level inflicted. Lethal damage always gets marked above Bashing. So if you mark a level of Bashing damage in the Bruised box and take one Lethal Health Level later, "move down" the Bashing level to the Hurt box by marking that box with a "/." The Lethal level is then noted by simply drawing another slash through the Bruised box, turning it into "X." Bashing levels taken after Lethal levels are simply drawn in on the next open box. Bashing damage isn't as severe as Lethal, so it's always marked last and healed first (see below).

HEALTH		
Bruised	-0	☒
Hurt	-1	☒
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Maimed	-3	☐
Crippled	-4	☐
Incapacitated		☐
Dead		☐

For Example: *Astin Marko has already taken a level of Bashing damage from a soldier's glancing punch (Astin's Health chart is noted with "/" in the Bruised box). Another soldier shoots Astin with a laser, scoring three Lethal Health Levels. Astin's chart is marked with "X" in the Bruised, Hurt and Injured Health Levels, and "/" in the Wounded box (essentially moving the punch's damage down the chart). The combined damage puts Astin at "-2" dice to all his rolls. Trying to escape, Astin pitches over the side of a wall and stumbles away.*

Bashing Damage

Bashing damage, from a distracting headache to a punch in the nose, covers all forms of injury that aren't likely to kill instantly, and that fade relatively quickly. Most forms of hand-to-hand combat inflict Bashing damage, as do mental "injuries" such as headaches, drunkenness or other mental distractions. Bashing damage generally impairs less than Lethal damage does, and heals faster.

Your character can die from Bashing damage, though. A punch may not cause as much trauma as a bullet does, but enough punches can kill. After your character reaches Incapacitated on the Health chart, each new Bashing injury, while soaked like a normal Bashing effect, is marked with a second slash on the highest Bashing level. This way, Bashing levels are turned progressively into Lethal damage. Once your character's Health chart is filled to Incapacitated with Lethal damage, the next level of damage taken, whether Bashing or Lethal, kills her.

For Example: *Astin, running with three levels of Lethal damage (X, X, X) and one of Bashing (/), hits a dead end. The soldiers catch up and batter him (inflicting three more Bashing Health Levels — /, /, /) until he blacks out. Astin is at Incapacitated with four Bashing damage levels left.*

Astin's merciless opponents then smash his prone body with punches and kicks. The first hit after Astin falls to Incapacitated causes one level of Bashing damage. So Astin's Wounded level, previously Bashing, has another slash drawn through it (for "X"), making it Lethal. This can be repeated three more times until Astin's remaining Health Levels are changed from Bashing to Lethal. The fourth level of damage, no matter whether it's Bashing or Lethal, will kill him.

If your character falls to Incapacitated due to Bashing damage, but then takes a level of Lethal damage, she's dead!

Lethal Damage

Humanity's ability to create devices capable of killing staggers the imagination. Knives, pistols, lasers and the like all cause Lethal wounds. Lethal damage is intended to cause immediate and grievous injury. Such wounds don't heal easily and usually require medical attention for any hope of recovery. Some psi powers can cause Lethal injuries, as well. Nature, too, provides numerous health hazards for humans. Electricity, vacuum exposure, hard radiation and fire all cause Lethal wounds.

Lethal damage kills with ruthless efficiency. When your character's Health chart fills to Incapacitated with Lethal damage, any further damage taken, whether Bashing or Lethal, kills her.

Soak

As noted above, Bashing damage isn't as immediately fatal as Lethal damage is; Bashing damage also heals more quickly (see **Recovery**, below). The human body can take more punishment from Bashing damage than it can from Lethal effects. This is reflected very simply. Use your character's full Stamina rating to soak Bashing attacks. However, Stamina cannot be used to soak Lethal attacks.

Armor can protect against both Bashing and Lethal damage, and may be added to your base soak against attacks. See **Armor**, page 266(in **Chapter Six: Technology**), for specific ratings.

Recovery

Minor injuries simply require time to heal. Medical attention is required to recover from serious levels of Bashing damage or from any form of Lethal damage. If your character reaches Crippled, whether from Bashing or Lethal damage, she must get professional help. At that level, your character can barely walk.

Healing Bashing Damage

Bashing damage up to the Wounded level can be cared for without medical skill; these wounds heal on their own, without treatment. Bashing damage beyond Wounded may have deeper consequences. Your character's vision or hearing may be altered due to a concussion, she may suffer excruciating pain from internal bruising, or may experience some other extreme discomfort. These effects can be negated if your character receives adequate medical attention.

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised to Wounded	One hour
Maimed	Three hours
Crippled	Six hours
Incapacitated	12 hours

Once Bashing levels reach Incapacitated, any further Bashing wounds are X'd over previous Bashing ones, making them Lethal (see **Bashing Damage**, above). At that point, recovery is handled as Lethal damage.

Healing Lethal Damage

Lethal damage of any sort can be deadly — that's why it's called Lethal. Lethal wounds that go unattended may continue to bleed until your character passes out and dies from blood loss. Other dangers can also arise from infection, cellular damage or broken limbs.

Any Lethal damage past Hurt requires medical treatment to prevent further harm. Untreated Lethal wounds worsen by one level of Lethal damage per day. When someone sustains Lethal damage down to Incapacitated, he's one Health Level away from death. If he takes one more wound (whether Bashing or Lethal), he dies.

If the individual is at Maimed or higher, he may recover with rest over the times listed below. However, if your character is Crippled or Incapacitated, no recovery is possible unless he receives medical attention. Indeed, at Incapacitated the individual is comatose at worse and delirious at best, and could still die.

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Maimed	Two months
Crippled	Three months
Incapacitated	Five months

The charts to the left list the time involved in healing damage. Bashing and Lethal damage recover differently. Recovery Time lists how long it takes to heal that specific Health Level; the time is cumulative. A character who has taken three levels of Bashing damage takes an hour to heal each one before he's fully fit. An individual who has suffered five Lethal damage levels takes three months to recover from Maimed to Wounded. After that, he needs an additional month and 11 days to reach full health. A character with four levels of Lethal damage and one of Bashing takes three hours to recover the Bashing level before he starts recovering from the Lethal wounds.

These recovery times assume the individual receives only basic care (first aid and bed rest). The times improve if the individual has access to modern health care. If he's treated by a physician with adequate skills (2 Medicine rating) and medicine during his recovery time, the character heals each Health Level at one time category higher on the health chart. If the patient forgoes special treatment at any point, he heals at normal rates.

If the individual receives care from advanced medical techniques (4 Medicine rating), he recovers each Health Level at two categories higher on the health chart. If this advanced treatment is not received at any point, normal healing rates apply.

No matter the quality of the treatment processes involved, each level of Bashing damage still takes at least an hour to heal, and Lethal damage still takes a minimum of one day per level to heal.

Of course, recovery times don't take into account psi healing. The systems described for vitakinetic powers take precedence over these systems.

For Example: *Astin is saved by a Legion patrol before the soldiers finish him off. They take Astin to a nearby clinic where a resident (2 Medicine rating) tends Astin's injuries (he has currently taken Lethal damage to Wounded and Bashing damage to Incapacitated).*

Thanks to the resident and the clinic's medical resources, Astin heals everything one category more quickly. He heals the Incapacitated Bashing level in six hours instead of 12, the Crippled Bashing level in three hours instead of six, and the Maimed Bashing level in one hour instead of three. Astin then heals his Wounded Lethal level in one week instead of one month, his Injured Lethal level in three days instead of one week, and heals his Hurt Lethal level in one day instead of three. However, his Bruised Lethal level still takes one day to heal.

In short, Astin recovers completely in 12 days and 10 hours. If he had survived but not received medical care, it would have taken 41 days and 18 hours to heal fully.

Sources of Injury

Psions live in a hostile universe. The dangers inherent to such an uncivilized environment are many, and they inflict the same kinds of harm that combat does.

Some sources of injury require that a damage effect be rolled, while others cause the subject to take damage automatically. If a system states that

the Storyteller "rolls damage effect," the damage is treated like an attack, including applying the character's soak. If it says the character "takes a Health Level," she takes the damage automatically, regardless of any defenses.

Disease

Psions are still human despite their enhanced evolution. They are therefore vulnerable to the same illnesses that normal humans are, both old diseases that defy medical progress and new ones that have emerged. For game purposes, colds and disease are applied as Bashing damage, although a soak roll isn't normally possible (certain psi powers may allow for one, however). A common cold inflicts one Bashing Health Level on your character for the duration of the sickness. A fever or flu inflicts three Bashing Health Levels. Rare diseases or alien viruses can be more devastating, even inflicting Lethal damage.

The Storyteller should decide on the exact effects (including altered perception, delirium and the like) of severe sicknesses. Permanent Attribute reductions may even occur. Resistance can help combat infection and sickness; Storytellers should adjust appropriately.

Electrocution

Even with advanced surge protection, redundant systems and automatic shutdown subroutines built into virtually all technological devices, electrocution is a danger. The strength of the electrical flow determines the amount of Lethal damage your character takes from electrocution. She suffers the damage effect noted below each turn until contact with the source is severed (not always an easy thing to accomplish, since electrocution tends to contract the victim's muscles, locking her in place as the electricity flows through her body).

Electrical damage is a Lethal effect, and armor doesn't protect against it (depending on the subject's defenses, the circumstance and the Storyteller's decision).

Damage Effect	Electrical Source
Two	Minor; wall socket
Four	Major; protective fence
Six	Severe; vehicle battery, junction box
Eight	Fatal; main feed line, subway rail

If your character is subjected to significant amounts of electrical damage (that reduce her to Incapacitated), she may suffer permanent damage. This can be physical impairment (reduced Physical Attributes), permanent memory loss, brain damage (reduced Mental Attributes) or disfigurement (reduced Social Attributes). Specifics are up to the Storyteller.

Falling

Your character can suffer great damage from falling significant distances. The Storyteller rolls one die of Bashing damage for every three meters (rounded down) that your character falls before hitting something solid. However, on a controlled fall, roll Athletics;

each success equals one meter that your character may fall before suffering injury. With two successes, your character could drop five meters before taking a die of Bashing damage — however, if she falls eight meters, she takes two dice.

Falling damage may be soaked as normal, but the Storyteller always rolls at least one die. Each success is a Bashing Health Level that your character takes. Landing on sharp objects can change the damage from Bashing to Lethal at the Storyteller's discretion.

If your character plummets 30 meters or more, she reaches terminal velocity. The damage effect reaches a maximum of 10 dice at this point, and is considered Lethal damage. Additionally, any armor your character wears in a terminal-velocity fall functions at only half its rating (rounded down), since it's not designed for this sort of punishment.

Fire

A fire's size and fuel determines the amount of Lethal damage your character endures. She suffers the damage effect for each turn that she's in contact with the flames; she must leave the area and/or put out any fire on her to stop taking damage. Fire damage is a Lethal effect and may ignore armor (depending on the armor type, the fire type and the Storyteller's discretion).

Damage Effect	Type of Fire
Two	Lighter
Four	Campfire
Five	Bonfire
Six	Welding torch
Seven	Raging inferno
Fire type x 2	Chemical fire

If your character falls to Maimed, she is scarred temporarily by the flames (reduce Appearance by one until her wounds recover to Bruised). If she is reduced to Crippled or Incapacitated by the fire, the burns cover the majority of her body, resulting in permanent scarring (reduce Appearance by one if Crippled, by two if Incapacitated). These results may be corrected with advanced plastic surgery.

Overexertion

Your character can perform sustained strenuous activity (running, swimming, climbing) for a number of hours equal to her Endurance Skill Total (default to Stamina). Beyond that duration, an Endurance roll is required for each half-hour (see **Feats of Endurance**, page 233). If a roll is failed, your character takes a Bashing Health Level. If activities persist, another Bashing level is suffered automatically for every half-hour's labor. Ongoing work can cause your character to collapse from exhaustion.

Intense physical activity (sprinting, digging) can be maintained for a number of minutes equal to Endurance Skill Total (Stamina default). Each minute beyond this time requires an Endurance roll. If this roll fails, your character takes one Bashing Health Level and must rest for at least 10 minutes.

Poison and Drugs

The effects of poison are varied. A poison's intended use determines its effect on the target. Drugs designed to induce sleep or to otherwise render the victim unconscious cause Bashing damage. Deadly poisons cause Lethal damage, whether slowly or quickly. Poisons that induce sickness or other special effects often do Bashing damage as they ravage the subject's system.

Poison damage ignores armor (however, any dots in the Resistance Ability or the Metabolic Efficiency or Antitoxin powers may be used to soak). A poison's damage effect is listed as a "toxin rating," and its dots vary depending on the substance's potency. Especially strong poisons might even inflict damage over a number of turns (roughly one turn for every two points in the toxin rating, rounded down). Hard liquor might have a 1 or 2 toxin rating, a strong sedative might rate a 4, and a deadly poison could be a 6 or higher.

Radiation

Radiation covers the broad range of energy emissions that surround and penetrate everything. All things reflect and create a certain amount of radiation; life requires it, but too much radiation can kill. For the purposes of game play, radiation is divided into two simple categories: soft radiation and hard radiation. Damage from either type cannot be soaked normally, although some gear or armor may bestow protection against radiation.

Victims of large or extended doses of radiation may suffer cancer, hair loss, brittle bones, mental problems and other debilitating effects.

- **Soft Radiation:** This includes all types of radiation that bombard humanity each and every day. High doses of soft radiation (x-rays, infra-red) can cause sickness and even physical injury. A character suffers one Bashing Health Level for each turn that she is exposed to high doses of soft radiation.
- **Hard Radiation:** This includes all other types of radiation, including gamma rays, cosmic rays and microwaves. Even minimal doses of hard radiation can be lethal. A character suffers one Lethal Health Level for every turn that she's exposed to hard radiation.

Suffocation and Drowning

Your character can hold her breath one minute for each point in her Endurance Skill Total (default to Stamina). After this duration, you must roll Endurance each turn (at an increasing level of difficulty; see **Feats of Endurance**, page 233). When you fail a roll, your character suffers one Bashing Health Level of damage. You must also make a Willpower roll or she panics (each success on the Willpower roll equals the number of turns

that your character remains relatively calm). A character who panics thrashes about in a desperate attempt to breathe; no planned or rational actions can be taken. A level of Bashing damage is suffered automatically every minute after your first failed Endurance roll, until your character can breathe again or dies. Your character also continues to panic until that time. After reaching Incapacitated, your character dies if she is not resuscitated (1 Medicine required to do so).

Temperature Extremes

Most human facilities are kept at a comfortable 20 °C. Still, humanity can survive far warmer or colder temperatures. When exposed to dangerously high (35 °C or higher) or low (-10 °C or lower) temperatures, your character suffers one Lethal Health Level for every day in that environment — this damage cannot be soaked, nor can it be recovered until your character gets to a more hospitable climate.

This rate of damage increases if the temperature exceeds the survivable range (say, inside a freezer where the temperature can drop as low as -20 °C). A temperature far beyond human survivability (Mercury's dayside, or deep space) kills in moments. Sustained exposure (if your character falls to Incapacitated) to severe temperatures can result in permanent damage. Heat can cause burns or disfigurement (reduce Appearance by one or more); cold may result in nerve damage or amputation (reduce Dexterity by one or more).

Vacuum

Exposure to the vacuum of space involves many dangers. First of all, the temperature can range from over 1000 °C when exposed to the sun, to -273 °C in a planet's shadow — either way, death is instantaneous to anyone exposed without adequate protection. Space also transmits cosmic radiation unimpeded — even minor exposure can be lethal.

Assuming your character is trapped in a vacuum, but is not exposed to outer space, survival chances increase dramatically. If an airlock malfunctions, for instance, she might lose all of her air, but isn't affected by deep space's deadly temperatures or radiation. In that case, asphyxiation is the main threat (refer to **Suffocation and Drowning**, above).

Mental States

Certain mental conditions can be more disabling than "mere" physical injury is. A physically healthy individual who suffers from a mental derangement can lose all ability to function. The Storyteller ultimately judges the effects of mental illness on an individual character.

Burnout

Particularly traumatizing events or chemical imbalances in the brain can make a sane person mad. Besides normal human frailties, psions also have to worry about *burnout* and *tolerance overload*.

• **Burnout:** Burnout occurs when a psion pushes her powers too far. If you botch a psi roll, the Storyteller may decide that your character loses a number of Psi equal to the botch, or may decide that your character loses use of the power in question for a number of minutes equal to the number of botches rolled.

True burnout occurs when you roll all 1s when trying to use a psi power. Your character loses a permanent Psi point *and* suffers a temporary loss of the power. She cannot use the botched power for a number of hours equal to the number of 1s rolled.

• **Tolerance:** Psions have the capability to increase their powers by bonding with biotech amplifiers, weapons and devices. Your character's Psi determines the total rating, known as her Tolerance, of all of the devices that she can carry at any given time. Should she exceed her Tolerance by carrying too many devices, your character loses one point of current Psi for each point that Tolerance is exceeded. The Psi isn't recovered until the extra bioware is removed.

If your character keeps the extra bioware for a number of days equal to her Psi, she gains a temporary disorder. The disorder passes after removing the equipment and gaining proper treatment (usually from a vitakinetic). Should the rating of all the bioware that your character has remain over her Tolerance for twice her Psi rating in days, the disorder becomes permanent.

• **Tolerance Overload:** Should your character's bioware rating ever total 10, she suffers an immediate tolerance overload. She gains a permanent derangement and could possibly die due to massive psychic trauma and system shock (specifics are up to the Storyteller, but should be devastating).

Mental Disorders

Stress, chemical imbalances and traumatic events can cause people to suffer mental disorders. **Æon** characters, while psionically enhanced, are no different. In fact, some research indicates that psi powers actually increase the likelihood of developing mental disorders. Various types of mental problems are described below.

- **Amnesia:** You forget a significant segment of your past due to physical trauma or mental scarring. This affliction can be so acute as to erase all memories or to simply cause you to forget a few hours of time.
- **Delusions:** Your mind plays tricks on itself, usually as a result of chemical imbalances. You see and hear things that don't actually exist. Mild cases can be distracting, but potent delusions can cause a complete detachment from reality.
- **Multiple Personality Disorder:** The Ministry actively studies this affliction as it affects some of the order's brightest pupils. Trauma can cause a single personality to splinter into distinct shards. Each personality possesses its own Nature and behaves differently from the others.
- **Schizophrenia:** This affliction causes a complete detachment from reality. Acute cases of paranoid schizophrenia are accompanied by severe delusions of persecution and elaborate paranoid theories.
- **Polar/Bipolar Disorder:** Also known as depression, polar disorder causes lethargy, depression and an inability to function in normal society for months at a time. Manic depressives suffer the same symptoms, but their bouts are interspersed with energetic bursts. Both derangements are caused by chemical imbalances in the brain.
- **Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder:** You are unable to resist a certain urge. This may cause you to perform ludicrous tasks or to seek absolute perfection in every detail.

Recovery

Many mental problems can be recovered from with chemical treatment and therapy. The Æsculapians have made great advances in recuperative treatments. Research currently focuses on the disorders brought on by psi powers. This includes burnout and overload, but research is also conducted on mental disorders associated with extended telepathic contact, clairsentient-induced delusions and even on trauma caused by excessive use of the Mentatis Mode.

Technology in the 22nd century derives from two sources: physical manufacturing processes (or hard technology) and organic manipulation (or biotechnology). Although each type involves strikingly different development and construction techniques, many devices from each form of technology have similar functions. When it comes down to the plain facts, hardtech and biotech devices are exactly that — gear, equipment and commodities. They're manufactured, sold and bought like any other physical resource, and form the backbone of much of 22nd-century commerce.

Hard Technology

Humans have used "hard" technology for centuries. It's still the cornerstone of 22nd-century society, from clothes to computers, armaments to arcologies. Biotechnology's emergence almost two decades ago took the world by surprise, and had a profound impact on the established hardtech industry. Many say biotech is "better" than hardtech, but that's hard to believe when you're faced by a horde of laser-armed psyq-bashers. Know all of your options. In the end, a rock kills as well as a psi-blast does.

Biotechnology

Bioware's introduction in the early 22nd century made an entirely new kind of technology available, one based on noetics rather than physics. Biotech has assumed a steadily growing niche in human science, industry and culture. Its potential applications are staggering, but its development is not yet at a stage where humanity can rely on it exclusively.

Formatted and Unformatted Bioware

Most bioware can be used *unformatted*; such technology doesn't have to be adjusted specifically to the user. Unformatted bioapps — guns, scanners, vehicles — have basic functions that anyone can apply. Attuning, or *formatting*, one of these devices to your character can unlock greater responsiveness and even additional functions in the bioware.

Your character can use the unformatted functions of someone else's formatted bioware, but cannot access its higher functions. A bioapp must be formatted to your character before he can utilize its full capabilities. A piece of bioware can have a number of formatted users equal to its Tolerance rating.

Only a psion can use formatted bioware; a normal human suffers psionic feedback if a bioapp is formatted to him. Such feedback can result in a bad headache, organic psychosis or even brain death, depending on the severity of the attack and the individual or individuals involved. See **Mental States**, page 256, for specific information.

Tolerance Ratings

Each piece of bioware has a *Tolerance* rating that indicates the Psi score needed to fuel the device. This rating is listed as a number of dots. An unformatted bioapp always has a one-dot Tolerance. The Tolerance of formatted bioware is listed after the device's description; for weapons, it's listed with the weapon's vital statistics on the **Weapons Chart**, pages 261 and 264. See **Tolerance**, page 193, for more information on the amount of bioware your character can handle at once.

A bioapp purchased under the Devices Background has a Tolerance score equal to the Background's rating.

Designating Hardtech and Biotech Devices

The various types of hardtech and biotech devices available in **Æon** are often listed side by side in this book. All gear has a technology type, or *Tech*, listing that differentiates between the two equipment types. The symbol "Ω" signifies a hardtech device, while "Ψ" denotes a biotech device.

The Formatting Process

Although the act of formatting bioware is relatively simple, a trained biotechnician is required to perform it. Each order has its own staff trained in the formatting process. These overworked techs process formatting requests, hook bioapps to conversion matrices, take an individual's DNA sample, inject it into a bioapp, process the genetic information and reconfigure the bioapp's operating systems to respond to the individual.

The formatting itself takes only an hour, but the requisition process can take days or even weeks. Since formatted bioware bonds itself to the user, the orders are careful about the amount of bioware that's formatted to each psion. The more powerful the bioapp, the more carefully the formatting technicians review the request. They also check the applicant's file for previous formatting, ensuring that more equipment won't plunge the psion into Tolerance Overload (see **Mental States**, page 256, for details).

The Storyteller should use the application process to keep tabs on a character's amount of formatted bioware. Formatted bioware endows a character with great power, but at a correspondingly high cost. Carrying around three pieces of unformatted bioware is notably different once the bioapps are attuned to a character. What amounted to 3 Tolerance before can suddenly be twice that or higher!

Orbital Manufacture

Many hardtech devices are available in one of two types: *regular* or *orbital* models. Both kinds are constructed using advanced steel or aluminum alloys, ceramics or a polymer-and-aluminum extrusion (at times erroneously called "plasteel" since it rolls off the tongue more easily than does, say, "polynum"). The materials and processes used to create these two types of hardtech don't differ greatly; it's simply where the gear is manufactured that makes the distinction.

Regular models are manufactured terrestrially, while orbital models are made on Luna or on orbital stations. Since orbital manufacturing doesn't involve significant amounts of gravity or environmental impurities, gear made on orbital platforms is lighter, stronger and of uniformly higher quality than is even the most advanced terrestrially produced equipment. With higher quality comes increased prices, though. Earth-made equipment still holds a significant portion of the hardtech market due to its relative affordability.

Most Asian companies use orbital manufacturing processes. Western manufacturers have some orbital plants, but still construct the majority of their products on Earth.

Hardtech objects manufactured in orbit typically weigh one-third less than do their Earthbound counterparts.

Buying Things

Monetary units and item availability vary wildly from culture to culture and place to place. To maintain a focus on story over record-keeping, all devices, equipment and miscellaneous gear in **Æon** are labeled with dots to indicate their value.

An item's *Cost* (as represented by its dot rating) may rise or lower depending not only on its inherent worth but on other factors such as availability and demand (fresh food costs quite a bit in mining outposts, while vac-suits are pretty cheap on Luna). Generally speaking, the higher an item's dot rating, the more expensive or rare (or both) it is.

Using Resources

You can use your character's Resources rating (see **Resources**, page 189) to purchase a given item. Resources don't translate directly into cash. However, your character's rating is used as a rough guide to how much money he has readily available at any given moment.

If your character's Resources rating exceeds an item's cost, he is considered to have enough credit or cash reserves to buy the object outright. If your character's Resources equals the item's cost, make a standard roll using his Resource rating. Your character can buy the item with at least one success; if you fail the roll, your character doesn't have enough money available at the time. If your character's dots in Resources are lower than the item's cost, you must achieve a number of *extra* successes on the Resources roll equal to this difference.

For Example: *Hiroko shops for a hovercycle. She has 3 Resources; the Reed Rosen Tsunami has a 5 cost, and a matching helmet has a 1 cost. Since the hovercycle's cost is two points higher than Hiroko's Resources, her player must roll at least three successes on the Resources roll, and gets 2, 6 and 8. One success isn't enough to buy the Tsunami, but since Hiroko's Resources is greater than the helmet's cost, she can buy that without a roll.*

The difference between your character's Resources and an item's cost also determines how frequently you can roll to acquire it. You can make an attempt each day of game time to try to buy an item with a cost rating equal to your character's Resources score. If the roll succeeds, the item is bought, but your character can't try to purchase anything else that day with a cost equal to or greater than his Resources. If the roll fails, your character doesn't have the money available to spend that day.

You can make only one roll a week in game time to acquire an item rated one dot higher than your character's Resources score. Whether the roll succeeds or not, your character cannot try for anything of that cost or higher for another week.

Similarly, you may roll once each month of game time for an item rated two points higher than your character's Resources score. You can roll once every six months of game time for an item with a cost that's three or more points higher than your character's Resources score. If your character's Resources rating increases during that time, you may attempt another roll immediately.

For Example: *Since the hovercycle's cost is two points higher than Hiroko's Resources score, she may not try to buy the bike (or any other five-point item) again for a month; her cash flow is simply too low. Hiroko could try for the less expensive Shendai LightRider, at a mere 3 cost. However, if her player fails the roll to acquire the cheaper cycle, Hiroko can't buy anything else with a 3 cost until the next day.*

Using Money

Resources represents your character's financial stability, but doesn't account fully for his available cash. Money gained through a quick score, a loan, luck or even mugging someone isn't normally considered a part of Resources. If your character gets some cash during a story, he can spend it or save it as he likes, but it doesn't really affect his Resources score. Accumulating sufficient wealth in the game can certainly be justification for increasing your character's Resources rating, though.

Your character can use money instead of Resources to buy something. Rough price ranges can be assigned to items, related to items' dot ratings. The

following guides give the Storyteller a quick reference to determine an item's cost range.

Item Cost	Price Range (in yuan)
•	1 to 50
••	51 to 200
•••	201 to 1,000
••••	1,001 to 5,000
•••••	5,001 to 50,000
••••••	50,001 to 500,000
•••••• ••	500,001 to 3,000,000
•••••• •••	3,000,001 to 25,000,000
•••••• ••••	25,000,001 to 75,000,000
•••••• •••••	75,000,001 to 500,000,000

The Storyteller should feel free to set a cost as she likes (or may even determine it randomly), since each price range is broad. While values are listed in yuan to represent the standard unit of exchange, this can be adjusted to represent a local currency. Your character can buy the item as long as he has enough money on hand.

Devices and Monetary Worth

The **Devices** Background (page 188) covers nonstandard items; gear that's modified heavily from its original design, or entirely unique items. A Device's rating doesn't translate directly into monetary worth, due to the gear's unusual nature. A Device's worth on the open market is rated at three dots higher than its Background rating, as a general rule. The Storyteller may modify this value depending on where and to whom your character tries to sell (or buy) a Device.

Bartering

Items can also be traded based on their relative dot values. A three-dot item might be worth another three-dot item. However, three one-dot items might not equal a single three-dot item (three chickens aren't generally worth a laser). This barter system also accounts for use of different types of money (yuan versus dollars versus pounds).

Gear

Gear is a catch-all term for any weapons, armor, tools or computers that your character carries. It's your essentials, your equipment, your stuff.

Encumbrance and Gear

All objects have mass, and there's only so much mass a person can carry (see **Encumbrance**, page 233). The mass amounts (designated by *Mass* on the equipment charts that follow) for personal gear, listed as kilograms, are not exact, nor are they meant to be. An item's approximate mass should be sufficient to determine if your character is overloaded, but Encumbrance shouldn't be monitored every moment of a game session.

The Storyteller may refer to the mass listings as often as she feels it's necessary, but don't let them detract from your game. ***Æon*** isn't an accounting course, after all.

Weapons

Weaponry is an important consideration for most psions, given their mission to defend humanity. Some Gifted feel that a small "holdout" laser offers sufficient protection, while others take no chances and load themselves up with laser gauntlets, shotguns, grenades and combat armor. No matter how your character equips himself, his best weapon is always his own wits.

Each weapon inflicts one of two types of damage. Temporary damage, called Bashing, is listed with a "B" next to a weapon's damage effect. Fatal damage, called Lethal, is indicated with a "L" next to a weapon's damage effect. When you roll to hit a target, you add any extra successes from the attack roll to your character's damage effect. This represents that your character has made an especially good shot or has hit a vital area.

A target's Stamina rating soaks Bashing damage (Stamina score in dice is removed from the damage Dice Pool), but her Stamina cannot soak Lethal damage (although armor exists that defends against Bashing and/or Lethal attacks). Lethal attacks are meant to kill, no two ways about it. See **Damage Types, Soak, Armor** and the **Optional Rule: Lethal Soak**, starting on page 240, for more details.

Damaging Weapons

Melee weapons can sustain two levels of Lethal damage, and ranged weapons can endure three levels before they are destroyed (Bashing damage could destroy a weapon, but it would take quite some time). Destroying a ranged weapon may cause it to explode, at the Storyteller's discretion. The Storyteller may also reduce a weapon's effectiveness if it sustains damage, but it isn't destroyed completely.

Melee Weapons

Sometimes your character is in a situation in which he can't or doesn't want to use his trusty firearm (his laser runs out of charge, his slugthrower might punch a hole in a ship's bulkhead). In times like these, it helps to have a backup. A sturdy tonfa or sharp orbital knife can be just as effective as a gun when a psion must defend himself.

Refer to the **Melee Weapons Chart**, page 261, for sample statistics and costs for each weapon.

- **Axe:** A reinforced steel blade, usually with a small claw on the opposite end, attached to a one-meter-long handle made of either wood or polymer. Axes are used in colonies and in Outback towns, and even on orbital stations as both tools and weapons.
- **Chain:** Chains are considered "pickup" weapons, although some martial arts styles involve using a one- or two-meter-long length of metal chain to devastating effect.

Melee Weapons Chart

The following chart lists samples of the melee weapons available in the 22nd century. Although organic weapons are maintained differently from hardtech ones, the damage inflicted by each type is determined in the same way.

The columns described below list information on each weapon's statistics.

Tech = Technology type. The symbol "Ω" represents a hardtech device, while "Ψ" indicates a biotech device.

Dmg = Damage rating. The *Dmg* rating of melee weapons is added to the user's Strength to determine basic damage effect. Firearms use only this rating for damage effect. "B" indicates Bashing damage. "L" indicates Lethal damage.

Mnv = Maneuvers. The combat maneuvers possible with the weapon, listed as: D = Disarm, P = Parry, S = Sweep, T = Throw Weapon, W = Weapon Strike, Tw = Two Weapons.

Conc = Concealability. The ease with which the weapon can be hidden on a person. P = can be hidden in a pocket; J = can be hidden inside a jacket; O = can be hidden under an overcoat; N = cannot be hidden on one's person at all.

Mass = The weapon's mass rating, listed in kilograms.

FT = Formatted Tolerance. Specific to bioapps, this is the item's Tolerance rating when formatted.

Cost = The relative expense of the weapon.

Weapon Type	Tech	Dmg	Mnv	Conc	Mass	FT	Cost
Axe	Ω	Strength + 4d10 L	D P T W	O	3	n/a	•
Chain	Ω	Strength + 5d10 B	D P S W	J	2.5	n/a	•
Claws	Ψ	Strength + 2d10 L	D W Tw	P	negligible	••	•••
Club	Ω	Strength + 4d10 B	D P W Tw	J	1	n/a	•
Fighting Gloves	Ω	Strength + 3d10 B	D P W Tw	P	0.5	n/a	••
Hammer	Ω	Strength + 3d10 B	D P W Tw	J	0.5	n/a	•
Knife, Enamel	Ψ	Strength + 2d10 L	D P T W Tw	J	0.5	n/a	•
Knife, Fighting	Ω	Strength + 2d10 L	D P T W Tw	J	0.5	n/a	•
Knife, Hunting	Ω	Strength + 1d10 L	D P W Tw	J	0.5	n/a	•
Nunchaku	Ω	Strength + 4d10 B	D P S W	J	1.5	n/a	•
Spider Harness	Ψ	5d10 L	W	O	5	••	••••
Staff	Ω	Strength + 6d10 B	D P S W	N	3	n/a	•
Sword, Foil	Ω	Strength + 3d10 L	D P W Tw	O	2	n/a	••
Sword, Saber	Ω	Strength + 5d10 L	D P W Tw	O	3	n/a	••

• **Claws:** A bioapp designed as a set of retractable claws implanted in your character's fingertips. Each claw is part of a finger, is attached to the bone, grows tendons, ligaments, capillaries, and shapes a channel through the fingertip for extension.

Claws restrict motion slightly in the last finger joint, so concert pianists and surgeons rarely desire them. Claws grow naturally and must be trimmed periodically to remain beneath the skin's surface when not in use.

Claws add three dice to climbing rolls and add two dice Lethal damage in melee combat. Tasks involving fine manipulation are rolled at +1 difficulty. This bioapp is highly restricted and must be formatted.

• **Club:** A club is any blunt object up to a meter long, from a polymer tonfa to a hammer to a table leg. Clubs are common since they are as effective as knives or guns in subduing an opponent, but aren't as immediately lethal.

• **Fighting gloves:** These gloves look much like an ordinary pair made of leather or polymer. However, the inner layer has a plasteel weave that makes a normal punch strike with the force of a hammer blow. The gloves also give the user a one-point soak against Lethal attacks that strike the wearer's hands.

• **Knife:** Knives include 15 cm long collapsible pocket knives, 25 cm long orbital steel hunting blades, 30 cm long nonmetallic enamel bioware, and 50 cm long plasteel combat bayonets.

• **Nunchaku:** This traditional martial arts weapon is essentially two half-meter-long lengths of wood or polymer joined together by a short length of chain. Some nunchaku are designed to screw the chained ends together as well, creating a meter-long club.

• **"Spider" battle harness:** A bioware backpack harness that charges and stores extra biolaser batteries. It has a durable photo- and thermosynthetic outer membrane that absorbs ambient light and heat, providing the harness with nourishment and powering up stored batteries (recharging takes roughly an hour per battery). The harness holds and can recharge up to six biolaser batteries at one time.

The Spider gets its nickname from the set of eight articulated spines that extend from its enamel chassis, and that protect the battery charger and clasp the wearer snugly around the shoulders and ribs. The harness "legs" help support the device and create the impression that a gigantic spider clutches the wearer's back.

The wearer of a formatted Spider can control the spines. The legs can extend backward, cushioning a fall

Biotech versus Hardtech Weapons

Biotech weapons use organic processes to simulate the effects of their hardtech counterparts. Knives still cut, whether they're made of orbital steel or matrix enamel. Lasers still burn, whether they use solar chargers or photosynthetic conversion. The average person knows little about the practical differences between bioware and hardware.

Those with some familiarity with biotech know that a bioweapon has a photosynthetic outer membrane protected by a ceramic or polymer casing. Organic energy cells link to a battery that nourishes the weapon and provides power (whether energy to generate a laser or compressed gases to fire projectiles). Nutrient clips fulfill a device's alimentary needs.

In fact, bioware manufacturers design bioapps with hardtech in mind. Organic pistols and carbines, for instance, look similar to their hardtech counterparts. If a biogun looks "normal," Joe Hologram is more inclined to use it. Organic weapons receive increasing acceptance in mainstream society thanks to affordable prices and pervasive advertising support.

Such "macrotech" devices are available on open markets, just as hardtech gear is. The very rare "microtech" or implanted bioapps are restricted or are illegal. The organic components that comprise implants aren't detectable by most scanning devices, creating all kinds of security problems.

See the **Weapons Chart**, pages 261 and 264, for specific macrotech weapon statistics and costs.

or keeping attackers at bay. They can also reach forward, assisting in climbing or spearing an opponent that the wearer already holds.

The harness gives the wearer a two-point soak against Bashing and Lethal damage directed at his back. If formatted to the user, the Spider adds two dice to Athletics rolls involving falling or climbing, and the legs inflict five dice Lethal damage in Melee combat.

- **Staff:** Not much more than a long club, a staff gives the wielder increased reach and allows for hard strikes due to a pendulum effect.
- **Sword:** Swords, like many other melee weapons, are currently in vogue. Unlike a firearm, a sword isn't likely to cause a hull breach.

Ranged Weapons

Almost any kind of weapon can be acquired, assuming one can pay the price. The specifics involved in buying and registering a firearm vary depending on location. The process can range from filling out a short form and paying a healthy tax (as in Russia), to sending in an application and a significant registration fee (as in the FSA), to simply talking to the fellow down the street (as in Argentina). While regions like Nippon, China and the upper levels of Olympus outlaw firearms entirely, you can find what you need if you look hard enough.

Refer to the **Ranged Weapons Chart**, page 264, for the statistics and costs of each weapon type.

- **Automatic:** Slugthrowers use a chemical reaction to fire solid projectiles at high velocities. While technological advances have improved on this process, projectile weapons haven't changed significantly in centuries. Though cheap and reliable, slugthrowers have the disadvantage of being noisy and dirty, and have messy results (particularly compared to a laser). Still, many swear by an automatic's effectiveness over that of a laser.

Automatic weapons are listed in pistol, carbine and heavy-assault-weapon designs (although carbines and even heavy assault weapons are quite compact).

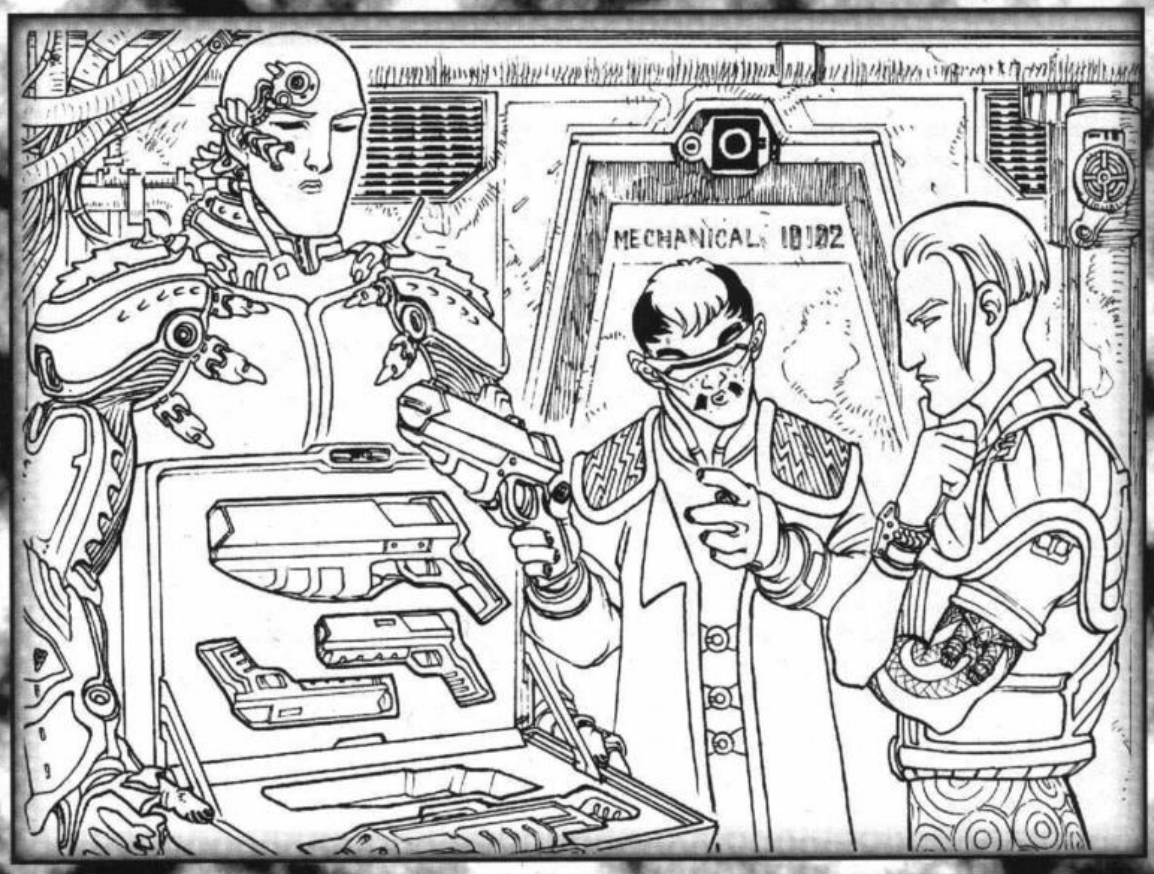
L-K AVENGER

- **Coilgun:** A portable electromagnetic accelerator, the coilgun launches projectiles at phenomenal velocities. Although somewhat bulky, a coilgun's tremendous range and penetration power make it a favored antitank weapon.
- **Enhancer gauntlet:** This bioapp channels the energy produced by Electrokinesis and Psychokinesis effects, focusing it into the gauntlet's power cell. Stored psionic energy is magnified by the cell, allowing the emitter to produce a potent laser beam. The gauntlet stores up to 10 shots; after that, your character can fire an additional shot for each Psi point spent. The beam acts like a conventional laser. The enhancer must recharge for two hours to regain the standard 10 shots.

If this gauntlet is formatted to the user, it adds two dots to your character's Modes, thereby increasing his effective level. Your character is restricted to the power effects at his *actual* level, but his Mode ratings act as two dots higher for determining such things as a power's range, duration or area of effect.

It is difficult, though not impossible, to burn out an enhancer's active cells, inflicting a severe migraine or even physical injury on the user. If an attack roll is botched while using an enhancer, make an Attunement backlash roll (see page 191). Obviously, use of this bioapp is restricted to psions with the Electrokinesis or Psychokinesis Aptitude.

- **Flechette weapon:** Also called "stingers," "needlers" or "dart guns," these projectile weapons use compressed gases to fire high-velocity metal or ceramic



darts in controlled bursts. Although quieter and considered more humane than automatic weapons, needlers' small, delicate-looking designs make them less than desirable to any but the well-heeled elite.

Organic flechette weapons have different configurations than do hardtech needlers, but function similarly. While organic flechette weapons can create their own darts, the process takes too long to be practical. Biotech stingers are designed to accept traditional flechette clips, instead. Weapon styles come in pistol and carbine models.

• **Grenade:** The typical hand grenade is a small, round object only five centimeters in diameter, with a pull-ring. Rifle grenades are roughly the same size, but have a cylindrical shape. A grenade's effects can be incendiary, fragmenting shrapnel, gas, a flash or a plasma explosion.

• **Laser:** The latest in personal weapons technology, lasers are relatively quiet, accurate and clean (aside from the smell of ozone and seared flesh). A hardware laser's size, shape and model vary with the manufacturer, but the main differences between them are their energy cells and emitter assemblies.

Biolasers use organic batteries. A single battery can be used to fire five shots. A depleted battery recharges in 10 minutes, or it can be exchanged for a charged one. An empty battery must be plugged into a charger to power up again.

ORGOTEK WASP II PULSE LASER

Lasers come in three styles: gauntlets, pistols and carbines. The differences between them are primarily cosmetic. A gauntlet is attached to a user's wrist, with the emitter positioned to fire from the back of the user's hand. Carbines have larger energy reserves and their emitters allow for more intense laser bursts than is possible with pistols or gauntlets.

VOSS 63K LASER CARBINE

Ranged Weapons Chart

The following chart lists samples of the firearms available in the 22nd century. Although organic weapons are maintained differently from hardtech ones, the damage inflicted by each type is determined in the same way.

The columns described below list information on each weapon's statistics. Ranged biotech weapons are listed in unformatted versions. Formatting adds two dice to a weapon's accuracy, and one die to its damage effect.

Tech = Technology type. The symbol "Ω" represents a hardtech device, while "Ψ" indicates a biotech device.

Acc = Accuracy. The dice added to the roll to hit an opponent. A "+3" adds three dice to the Dice Pool for that attack.

Dmg = Damage rating. The *Dmg* rating of melee weapons is added to the user's Strength to determine basic damage effect. Firearms use only this rating for damage effect. "B" indicates Bashing damage. "L" indicates Lethal damage.

Range = This is the weapon's practical range in meters; attacks at this distance incur no penalty. Maximum range is twice the listed distance; attacks at this range are at +2 difficulty. Attacks in between medium and maximum range are made at +1 difficulty. Point-blank shots (within two meters) add two dice to accuracy.

Mnv = Maneuvers. The combat maneuvers possible with the weapon, listed as: Af = Automatic Fire, Ms = Multiple Shots, Sa = Semi-Auto Burst, Sp = Spray, St = Strafing, Tw = Two Weapons. Aiming, Cover, Cover Fire and Reloading may be used with all firearms.

ROF = Rate of Fire. The number of shots the weapon can fire in a single turn.

Clip = The total number of shots contained in the weapon's clip (caseless ammunition for all projectile weapons, except shotguns; charges for all energy weapons). Slugthrowers can have one additional round loaded in the chamber.

Conc = Concealability. The ease with which the weapon can be hidden on a person. P = can be hidden in a pocket; J = can be hidden inside a jacket; O = can be hidden under an overcoat; N = cannot be hidden on one's person at all.

Mass = The weapon's mass rating, listed in kilograms.

FT = Formatted Tolerance. Specific to bioapps, this is the item's Tolerance rating when formatted.

Cost = The relative expense of the weapon.

Model	Tech	Acc	Dmg	Range	Mnv	ROF	Clip	Conc	Mass	FT	Cost
Autopistol											
Banji Cyclone	Ω	0	4d10 L	50	Ms Sa Tw	2	16	P	0.5	n/a	••
L-K Defender 9mm	Ω	0	4d10 L	50	Ms Sa Tw	2	18	J	0.5	n/a	••
Heavy autopistol											
L-K Avenger 11mm	Ω	0	5d10 L	50	Ms Sa Tw	2	20	J	1	n/a	••
Stavros 11mm Auto	Ω	0	5d10 L	50	Ms Sa Tw	2	16	J	1	n/a	••
Automatic carbine											
Banji 7.62 Tornado	Ω	0	7d10 L	300	Af Ms Sa St Tw	40	40	O	3	n/a	•••
L-K MAC-803	Ω	0	7d10 L	300	Af Ms Sa St Tw	45	50	O	4	n/a	•••
Shotgun											
Banji Thunder	Ω	+5	6d10 L	30	Ms Tw	2	15	O	2.5	n/a	••
L-K Protector Auto	Ω	+5	5d10 L	30	Ms Sa Tw	10	20	O	3	n/a	•••
Stavros .00 Shotgun	Ω	+5	5d10 L	30	Ms Tw	2	12	O	3	n/a	••
Laser gauntlet											
Orgotek MiniPulse-L	Ψ	0	3d10 L	80	Ms Sp Tw	2	12	P	0.5	•	•
Orgotek Pulse-L Gauntlet	Ψ	+1	5d10 L	270	Ms Sp Tw	2	35	O	1.5	••	•••
Orgotek Iris-L II Enhancer	Ψ	+1	7d10 L	450	Ms Sp Tw	2	special	O	1.5	•••	••••
Laser pistol											
Alchemy 2117-A Biopistol	Ψ	0	4d10 L	230	Ms Sp Tw	2	25	J	1	•	••
Banji Spark	Ω	0	3d10 L	100	Ms Tw	2	10	P	0.5	n/a	•
L-K Personal Protector	Ω	0	4d10 L	250	Ms Sp Tw	2	25	J	1	n/a	••
Orgotek Wasp II Pulse Laser	Ψ	+1	4d10 L	250	Ms Sp Tw	2	30	J	1	•	••
Voss 33K	Ω	+1	4d10 L	300	Ms Sp Tw	2	30	J	1	n/a	••
Laser carbine											
Alchemy 2118-D Biocarbine	Ψ	0	8d10 L	510	Ms Sp Tw	15	40	O	3.5	••	•••
L-K Vindicator II	Ω	0	8d10 L	550	Ms Sp Tw	20	40	O	3.5	n/a	•••
Orgotek Hornet VI Pulse Laser	Ψ	+1	8d10 L	570	Ms Sp Tw	20	45	O	3.5	••	•••
Voss 63K	Ω	+1	7d10 L	600	Ms Sp Tw	25	50	O	3	n/a	•••

Ranged Weapons Chart

Model	Tech	Acc	Dmg	Range	Mnv	ROF	Clip	Conc	Mass	FT	Cost
Flechette weapon											
Alchemy Bulldog F-40 Bioflechette	Ψ	+1	3/5/7d10 L*	35	Ms* Tw	5/10/15*	40	J	1	•	••
Aris SureSting Flechette Pistol	Ω	+1	3/5/7d10 L*	30	Ms* Tw	5/10/15*	40	J	1	n/a	•••
Orgotek Stinger Autopistol	Ψ	+1	2/4/6d10 L*	30	Ms* Tw	3/8/12*	20	P	0.5	•	••
Orgotek Scorpion Autocarbine	Ψ	+1	5/7/9d10 L*	75	Ms* Tw	5/7/9*	90	O	3	••	•••
Sonic weapon											
Aris Whistler Sonic Pistol	Ω	0	6d10 B**	50	Ms Tw	1	20	J	1	n/a	•••
Aris SuperSonic Carbine	Ω	0	8d10 B**	75	Ms Tw	5	30	O	3	n/a	••••
Taser weapon											
Banji Lightning Taser Baton	Ω	0	6d10 B**	20	Tw	1	20	J	1.5	n/a	••
Orgotek Electric Eel Taser Pistol	Ψ	0	6d10**	25	Tw	1	30	J	2	•	••
Web emitter											
Alchemy Webgun	Ψ	+3	3d10 †	10	Tw	1	7	O	4	•	••
L-K Netgun s5-ST	Ω	+3	3d10 †	15	Tw	1	5	O	3	n/a	••
L-K Netlauncher s9-MT	Ω	+5	5d10 †	30	n/a	1	9	N	5	n/a	•••
Orgotek Spinneret	Ψ	+3	4d10 †	15	Tw	1	10	O	4	•	••
Heavy weapons											
L-K Killjoy Missile Launcher	Ω	0	12d10 L	5 km	n/a	1	4	N	12	n/a	•••••
L-K Junior r3 Light Coilgun	Ω	0	9d10 L	600	Af Ms Sa St	50	60	N	12	n/a	••••
L-K Big Boy r5 Heavy Coilgun	Ω	0	12d10 L	800	Af Ms Sa St	60	80	N	16	n/a	•••••
Voss 88T Plasma Gun	Ω	+2	9d10 L	30	Ms Sp	15	20	N	20	n/a	•••••
Grenades††	Ω	0	special	special	n/a	1	1	P	0.5	n/a	•

* Flechette guns have adjustable fire settings. "Low" inflicts the lowest listed damage and fires the fewest number of darts. "Medium" does a mid-range amount of damage and fires a greater number of darts. "High" inflicts the highest listed damage and shoots the greatest number of darts.

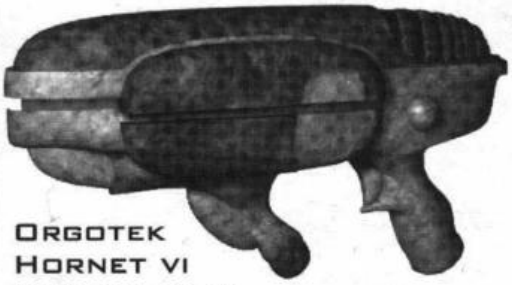
** Screamers and tasers ignore armor, unless the armor states specifically that it defends against sonic or electrical attacks. The target's Stamina is used to soak, if applicable. Damage changes from Bashing to Lethal for black-market screamers. Tasers are also designed to function as tonfas for melee combat.

† Web emitters don't do any damage. The rating under *Dmg* is rolled (along with extra successes from the attack) without any modifiers from soak. Each success on the damage roll is subtracted from the target's Dexterity score, which in turn hinders movement. The subject's mobility and Dexterity-based Dice Pools are reduced by this amount until she escapes from the webbing.

†† Grenades have various effects. Flash grenades have a five-dice "damage" effect, inflicting blindness over a one-meter radius, and burn for one turn for each success rolled (IR and UV senses are also disrupted for the same duration). For each damage success rolled, a target is blinded for one turn. Fragmentation does nine dice of Lethal damage at the point of impact; damage is reduced by one die for each meter that a target is away from the blast (roll damage separately for each target). Incendiary inflicts five dice of Lethal flame damage in a two-meter radius for three consecutive turns. Plasma grenades do seven dice of Lethal flame damage in a three-meter radius for five consecutive turns.

Gas grenade effects last for five turns, cover a three-meter radius and ignore armor (although breathing apparatus counteract gas effects). Poison gas inflicts six dice of Lethal damage. Sleep gas calls for a resisted action (six dice gas against the target's Resistance). If this rolls fails, the target falls unconscious for 15 minutes. Smoke applies +2 difficulty to all Perception and targeting rolls due to obscurement.

Hand-grenade range is based on the user's throwing range. A hardtech grenade launcher costs •• and may be attached under any standard carbine barrel, and has an effective range of 250 m.



ORGOTEK HORNET VI PULSE LASER CARBINE

• **Plasma weapon:** This heavy weapon fires a stream of hot ionized gases reminiscent of a flamethrower's projection — although a plasma weapon is orders of magnitude more intense. Even a heavily armored target can be roasted inside his unsealed suit by the superheated plasma. The gun's usefulness is restricted by its bulky fuel tank and limited range.

• **Shotgun:** The shotgun is useful for those who seek coverage over accuracy. Many military types keep a shotgun on hand as a backup weapon. Virtually all shotguns hold at least a dozen rounds; the rounds themselves vary from slugs to pellets to even rock salt.

L-K PROTECTOR AUTO-SHOTGUN

• **Sonic weapon:** Also called "screamers" or "stunners," sonics emit a focused sound beam designed to interfere with a target's nervous system. Since these weapons normally incapacitate without causing injury, screamers are often used as law-enforcement weapons. Black-market screamers cause physiological damage through subsonic emissions, and are usually illegal.

ARIS WHISTLER SONIC PISTOL

• **Taser:** These "zappers" fire electrical charges that cause nerve disruption and unconsciousness. Like sonics, tasers are generally nonlethal and are used for law-enforcement purposes.

• **Web emitter:** Also called a "netgun," "webgun" or "goop gun," a web emitter fires a constricting, viscous, sticky substance. The webbing is similar to a spider's, but is much stronger. Webs dry into a hard, permeable layer in an instant, immobilizing, but not suffocating the target.

Originally used for crowd control, the netgun has since been introduced to the open market. The savvy shopper can choose from bulky pistol models that fire a single-person-restrictive "webnet," to shoulder-mounted versions that shoot charges large enough to snare a half-dozen people at once.

Hardtech and biotech web emitters are virtually identical. The former uses synthetic webbing, while the latter excretes organic webs.

Armor

Armor protects its wearer from damage. Some individuals feel that they can never have too much armor. While violence is inherent to the **Æon** universe, be practical. Not even Legionnaire Avengers or Federated States Military Marines are decked out every minute of the day. If your character is an Orgotek PR rep, it's unreasonable to assume that he's as well-armored as is a soldier. There are also social and legal implications to wearing armor in certain environments — a character can be arrested for wearing heavy armor without a license on the upper levels of Luna. Try to find a happy medium for your character. Choose armor that is appropriate to him and that makes him reasonably well-protected, but not burdened. Ultimately, the amount of armor that your character wears doesn't matter. If someone really wants to hurt your character, he'll find a way.

Armor Ratings

Armor has two types of defensive ratings: Bashing and Lethal. These ratings indicate the number of points that you may add to your character's soak when he suffers the appropriate type of damage.

Additionally, armor has a *Bulk* rating, listed in the description of each armor type. This score is more than an indication of the armor's mass (Mass covers that variable). Instead, Bulk reflects how armor restricts the wearer's mobility. Bulk rating applies as a difficulty against all Dexterity-based actions. It is also subtracted from your character's Dexterity for purposes of determining Movement.

An item's armor rating is listed in brackets after the description. Bashing and Lethal defenses are noted in that order (divided by a "/") and followed by the Bulk rating. If any one of these scores is a zero, then the item doesn't have a rating in that category.

For Example: *An armor vest has the following armor rating: "[1/3 torso only, 0]." The "1" is the device's Bashing soak, "3" is its Lethal soak, and "0" is its Bulk*

rating. It notes further that this protection applies to only torso shots. So if your character is punched in the chest, you add one point to his soak against that attack. If it was a laser shot, he would have a 3 soak. The vest doesn't restrict your character's movements due to its relatively light weight.

A piece of armor can sustain only so much damage before it becomes useless. If the damage successes rolled in a single Lethal attack (after soak reduces the Dice Pool appropriately) equal or exceed at least twice the armor's rating, the armor is effectively destroyed. The armor's soak for that attack still applies, but it doesn't defend against any subsequent damage.

The Storyteller should use her imagination when describing the specific manner in which an attack destroys armor. A projectile blows a huge hole in the armor; a laser beam slices through it; plasma melts it to slag; acid eats away at it.

Armor Types

None of the armor types listed below are equipped for vacuum. However, a vacuum environment suit (or VES) may be worn in addition to armor. Your character can also layer light armor under heavier varieties (putting reinforced clothing or a VES under an armor carapace, for instance). Armor's Bashing and Lethal soak scores, and Bulk and Mass ratings are cumulative. Armor types heavier than bioweave (armor types with a Mass of 4 or more) are too bulky to wear under other forms of armor. Your character cannot wear a field suit and combat armor at the same time.

• **Armor Carapace:** Also known as a "beetle" or "bug suit." This biotech armor is grown organically, but offers no formatting benefits (a bioVAS without the bells and whistles). [3/3, 1] Tech: Ψ, Mass: 10, Cost: ••••

• **Armor Vest:** A monofiber vest with small ceramic plates. [1/3 torso only, 0] Tech: Ω, Mass: 2, Cost: ••

• **Bio-organic Vacuum Assault Suit (bioVAS):** This symbiotic organism, based on Qin biotechnology, is covered with segmented bioceramic plates that are connected by multilayered, modified spider silk, and sealed with advanced fiberweave. The bioVAS protects against vacuum and blocks hostile radiation, and biological and chemical emissions. The plate system covers an integral musculature, providing enhanced strength without interfering with movement or manipulation.

The suit runs for up to four hours off an energy cell and a nutrient battery. If the batteries run out, the bioVAS switches to backup photosynthetic nodes that power it for an additional 30 minutes. These nodes recharge themselves in 15 minutes after being depleted. During recharging, the bioVAS maintains only life-support systems, and is otherwise immobile. While a person can wear and survive in a suit for some time, the basic suit lacks human nourishment sources.

Aside from its protective capabilities, the basic bioVAS adds three dots to your character's Strength. Gauntlets, sensors, maneuvering thrusters and other bioware may be integrated as well (refer to specific bioapps for costs and Tolerance ratings). Access to a bioVAS is highly restricted, and one must be formatted. [4/4, 1] Tech: Ψ, Mass: 30, Tolerance: •••, Cost: ••••••

• **Bioweave Armor:** This armor is formed by connective tissue and modified spider silk. The bioweave conforms to your character's body, even shaping myriad tiny holes to allow hair to grow through. A layer of clothing covers most of the bulk that this armor adds to your character's body. The armor's exterior is soft and flexible, and taps into the wearer's skin cells for color coding, disguising it from detection by all but close examination.

The organism gets nutrients from your character's body through connected microfibrils. The bioweave peels away easily with a special release spray, and relaxes for easy storage.

Access to bioweave armor is restricted, and it must be formatted to your character. [2/3, 0] Tech: Ψ, Mass: 3, Tolerance: •••, Cost: •••••

• **Combat Armor:** Full-body, hard-shell combat gear worn by advanced tactical soldiers and police forces. It is not available to commercial markets. [3/4, 2] Tech: Ω, Mass: 12, Cost: ••••

• **Fiberweave:** An organic weave lining added to normal clothing (essentially, an early version of bioweave armor). The armor adds little mass, and tough fibers offer moderate protection. [0/1, 0], Tech: Ψ, Mass: 0.5, Cost: • (including installation)

• **Field Suit:** A lighter version of combat armor, made of monofiber weave and ceramic inserts. [1/3, 0] Tech: Ω, Mass: 6, Cost: •••

• **Helmet:** From cycle helmets to military-issue headgear, helmets are important if you don't want your head to be crushed. Styles vary dramatically, but all protect equally well. [2/2, head only, 0] Tech: Ω, Mass: 1.5, Cost: •

• **Reinforced Clothing:** This usually consists of petrocotton slacks or a monofiber-laced overcoat. The clothing can be designed in the latest styles for an additional • to the cost. [0/2, 0] Tech: Ω, Mass: 2, Cost: ••

Heavy Metal

Olaminium is a highly effective defense material. It is already in great demand as shielding against cosmic radiation, and for various military applications. Its availability on the open market is limited severely.

Olaminium-laced armor adds two points to any armor rating; pure-olaminium armor adds four points (this purity bonus is not cumulative with that for olaminium-lacing). Adding olaminium increases armor's normal weight and volume (double the armor's Mass and Bulk — armor with 0 Bulk has a minimum of 1 Bulk when olaminium is added).

Olaminium is also useful for weapons. Laced bullets add two dice to Lethal damage, and pure-olaminium bullets add four dice.

The damage and armor adds of vehicle weapons and armor that are laced with olaminium are increased by three points, respectively. The adds of pure-olaminium projectiles and armor increase by five points each.

Olaminium-laced gear costs at least two dots more than is standard for an item. Pure-olaminium items cost a minimum of three dots more than is standard. This applies to only hardtech; olaminium cannot be incorporated into biotech — yet.

Clothes

Twenty-second-century clothing styles range from hyper-chic to neo-deco, extravagant to utilitarian. Whatever your character is looking for, he's sure to find it in some "members only" boutique or in a corner thrift shop.

• **Boots, Expensive:** Soft, low boots in a variety of styles with medium-sized heels are in fashion for both sexes. Tech: Ω, Mass: 0.5, Cost: •••

• **Boots, Work:** Reinforced toe and heel, with several fasteners. Usually heavy — mainly because they need to be, but also because people occasionally want to kick things. Mass: 1.5, Cost: ••

• **CBG Gear:** A protective suit for use in areas where chemical-biological-genetic threats exist. The suit doesn't offer other physical protection, although it can be worn over armor (Lethal damage can puncture it easily). Tech: Ω, Mass: 2, Cost: •••

• **Coveralls:** The current casual dress of the rebellious youth (and the workaday lower classes), jumpsuits and coveralls are common. Styles range from expensive, designer, form-fitting jumpsuits to moderate, casual, baggy coveralls. Coveralls and 'suits are usually worn under an overshirt or jacket. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: •

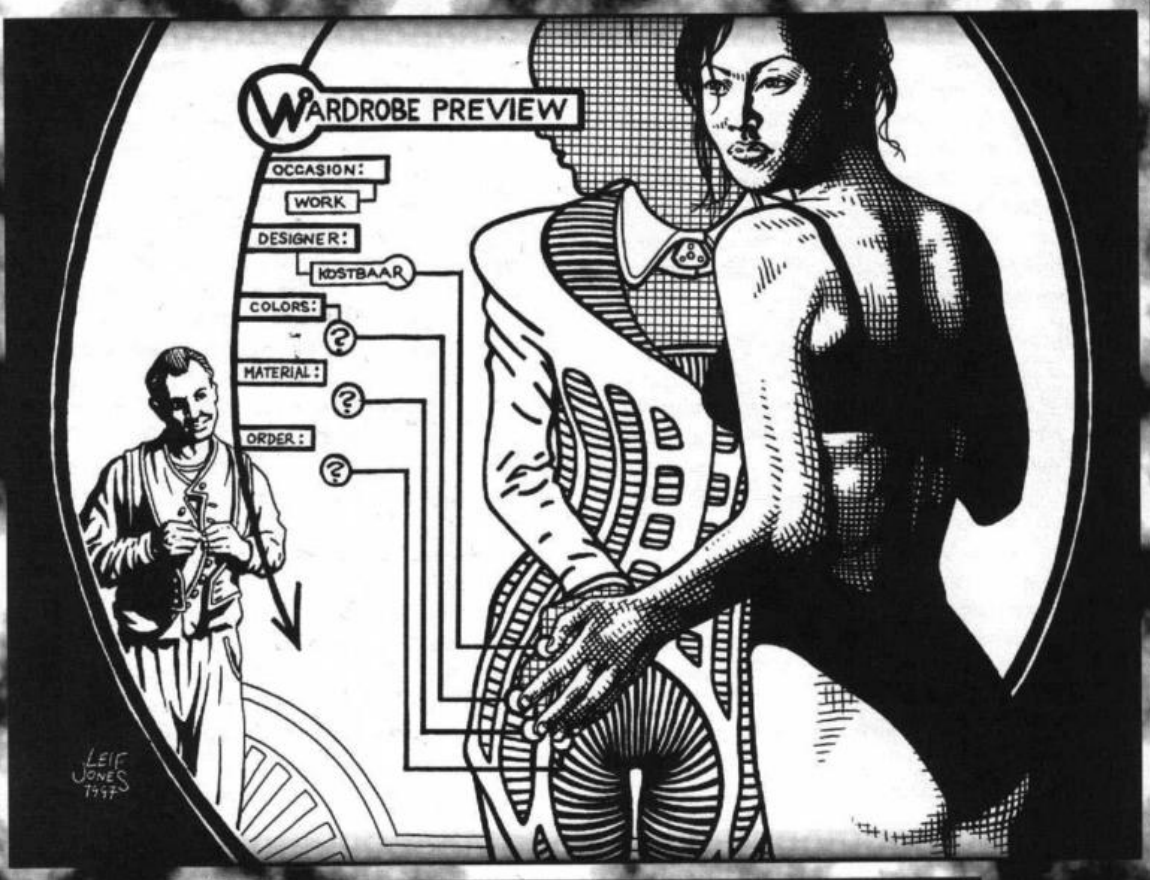
• **Evening Wear:** The tuxedo is as timeless as ever, although women wear them almost as often as men do. Stylish frocks (commonly Kostbaar) are all the rage. Many are styled for men as well as for women. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: ••••

• **Gloves:** Sturdy leather or polymer gloves useful for a variety of purposes. [0/1, 0] Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: •

• **Jackets:** Styles, colors and functionality run the gamut. North American and Lunar jackets are generally bulky (for effect) and come in solid neutral tones. South American and African coats are large, tapered and in a rainbow of patterns. Asian jackets follow traditional cuts updated for the 22nd century.

No matter the exact cut, jackets are usually well-made and durable. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: ••

• **Organic Clothes:** These clothing styles are almost identical in appearance to clothes created through hardtech processes. Despite bioware companies' best



efforts, though, organic clothes remain a niche market. People are somewhat loathe to wear actual "living things" — an erroneous assumption, since virtually all bio-organic outfits are bioware excretions, much like silk is spun from worms. Sales in South American nations and in colonies do show promise.

Additionally, organic clothes have no effective Tolerance rating. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 1, Tolerance: negligible, Cost: • (cheap), ••• (expensive)

• **Smart Clothes:** Clothes with holographic surfaces and computers built into them do exist. However, current styles lean toward the "natural." Smart clothes are considered fashionable only by the technophilic Nihonjin. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: ••• (cheap), •••• (expensive)

• **Suits:** Day-to-day business fashions among both genders tend to be either broad-shouldered, tapered Brazilian suits or collarless jackets. Colors vary, but the current trend is for cool winter tones. Inexpensive suits, while still of good quality, are made with cheap fabric and in understated styles. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: •• (cheap), Cost: ••• (expensive)

• **Vacuum Environment Suit (VES):** The space traveler's best friend, perfect for hostile environments. Aside from having a built-in computer and dedicated agent, the VES has an emergency transponder and is made of a dual monofiber weave. A VES can be worn for a maximum 14 hours straight before it fails to provide life support. [1/2, 1] Tech: Ω, Mass: 3, Cost: ••••

Computers

The personal computer (or "minicomp") of the 22nd century is a powerful machine, capable of performing a wide variety of functions. Indeed, a minicomp's effectiveness is limited mainly by its user. It can serve as a portable daily planner, accounting system, phone book, atlas, thesaurus, personal entertainment center and workstation.

Although minicomps vary in style and design, they all have the same fundamental elements. A minicomp is basically a rounded box, 15 x 8 x 3 cm, with straps for wearing it on one's arm or attaching it to a belt. It has a holographic projector that can create an image 50 x 25 x 25 cm in size, it has faux-stereo speakers, and it can vibrate to give a silent alert.

A minicomp also has an inset microphone, a disk-reader and a camera in its top surface. It has three S10 (Standard Input/Output) jacks (with one-meter, extending optical cables), a retractable roll-out screen for flat projection, a factory-equipped basic computer agent, and room for up to three additional hardware add-ons.

The average minicomp has a 10-bloc-data-storage capacity (one bloc can hold roughly a half-gigabyte's worth of information). The computer's agent requires a number of

blocs worth of storage equal to its Performance rating (see **Performance**, page 272). In fact, an entire standard FIOS (fully interactive operating system) takes up a third of a minicomp's storage space with fail-safe monitors, dynamic program routines, hologram templates, HVT (hologram-to-verbal-to-text) conversion programs, and basic language translation systems. Add-on applications are packed with megabytes worth of programming. Essentially, a minicomp's storage capacity gets used up very quickly.

Fail-safes

Fail-safes are among the many computer-protection products that resulted from the OpNet crash of 60 years ago. Designed to prevent intrusion from unregistered users, fail-safes run on a continuous cycle, searching for anything anomalous during interface.

In game terms, if your character tries to hack into a system (using an Ability, psi power or even a trusty computer agent), you roll the appropriate Skill Total in a resisted action against the computer's fail-safe rating. The fail-safe ratings of electronic devices are listed after the items' descriptions.

If the computer's fail-safe roll achieves more successes than or merely ties the hacker's roll, your character doesn't get in. You must score more successes for your character to gain access to the system. Since fail-safes run on a continuous monitoring cycle, you must roll against the fail-safe for every five turns that your character is in the system (unless he finds some way to disable the subroutine...). A botch on an access roll could cause the system's security agents to come after your character, or worse.

For Example: *Chei Leung tries to hack into Korist Design Systems' administrative computer. Chei Leung's player rolls his character's 7 Engineering (3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 9 and 0) against the KDS mainframe's 6 fail-safe (2, 4, 4, 5, 7 and 8). With three extra successes, Chei Leung gets in without a hitch. Five turns later, Chei Leung's player rolls 2, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 8 against the fail-safe's roll of 3, 5, 8, 9, 9 and 9. Unfortunately for him, Chei Leung's digging runs afoul of the KDS mainframe's security and he is ejected automatically from the system.*

All major systems with fail-safe ratings are equipped with security agents, known as "SAs" or "guards" (minicomps simply use the computers' regular agents; see **Agents and Avatars**, page 271). Guards are computer agents with very narrow capabilities. A SA's primary duty is to oust unregistered users. Its secondary job is to gain information on the intruder. A hacker doesn't have to worry about guards as long as he stays out of protected areas (generally speaking).

Physical Security Systems

Computer systems handle most aspects of physical security in buildings and on spacecraft. Basic security involves plugging the system into cameras over entranceways and into lock panels. A truly "tight" facility has voice checks, fingerprint checks, retina scanners and DNA scanners, all backed up by a powerful server that's connected to emplaced weapons, gas emitters and an electrified floor.

Humans are usually easier to fool than machines are (you can't fast-talk a computer, plead to it for mercy or offer it bribes). However, many facilities maintain human security as well, just in case the security system is subverted or hacked.

Personal Computer Systems

- **Wazukana 300E Personal Computer:** The 300E is the most popular minicomp on the market, made in a fetching neo-deco ovoid design, and available in a variety of colors. 3 Fail-safe. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: ••
- **Wazukana DX70 Personal Computer:** The DX70 is designed for rugged use, complete with an airtight plasteel shell (for a [2/2, 0] armor rating). A law-enforcement version, the DX70-L, comes equipped with an emergency transponder and the Lt. Bushido law-enforcement agent. 5 Fail-safe. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1.5, DX70 Cost: •••, DX70-L Cost: ••••
- **Steinhardt VirtuX Minicomp:** A close second to Wazukana's 300E, the VirtuX has an angular, boxlike design for the utilitarian-minded. 2 Fail-safe. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: ••
- **Steinhardt MI-AC II Minicomp:** An advanced minicomp used by diplomats, government agents and corporate heads alike. The MI-AC has the MI-CC's durable shell [3/3, 0], cellular link and locator beacon. The MI-AC also comes with the Friday advanced computer agent. 7 Fail-safe. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1.5, Cost: ••••
- **Steinhardt MI-CC Minicomp:** The MI-CC was originally contracted for the Federated States Military (complete with a [3/3, 0] ceramic-polymer shell, cellular link, locator beacon and Patton military agent). Its solid dependability gave rise to the P-CC, a civilian version lacking the cell link and Patton agent. 5 Fail-safe. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1.5, MI-CC Cost: ••••, P-CC Cost: •••

Peripherals and Other Computer Gear

- **Cellular Uplink:** Also simply called a link, this hardware add-on allows for access to cellular transmission "air lines." Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: ••• (installation), Cost: •••• (monthly cell-line rental), Cost: •• (average 10-minute domestic call)
- **Datapad:** The dpad is a no-frills "electronic clipboard"; a minicomp containing set files (questionnaires, legal or test forms, checklists). It has one SIO, slaved via

Organic Computers

Biotech computers haven't caught on with the public yet. Biocomps are currently components of other biotech systems (like a vehicle or an advanced combat chassis). Orgotek claims the possibilities inherent to biocomps are staggering, but the corporation is waiting until it creates a truly innovative organic computer system before it puts biocomps on the commercial market.

In the meantime, hardtech computer companies such as Wazukana and Steinhardt scoff openly at the very idea, while scrambling privately for all of the information on biotech computers that they can get their hands on.

hard line or infra-red beam to a minicomp or server. The information entered on a datapad is downloaded easily to the main system's database. Tech: Ω, Mass: 0.5, Cost: •

• **Datatap:** A modified version of a datapad, this simple device fits around any standard optical cable. The dtap contains a disk's worth of storage capacity and records all data-traffic passing through the cable. Access to datataps is highly restricted. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: •••

• **Disk:** Portable data storage. A disk is an orbital data crystal contained in a matte-white case that is 50 x 25 x 3 mm in size. Storage capacity is 1.3 blocs. Since data storage and retrieval uses laser transmission, data cannot be wiped magnetically. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (box of 10)

The Ghost Is Not in the Machine

Interfacing with the 22nd-century's isolated OpNet isn't like something out of a cyberpunk novel. Your character either uses a computer agent (that electronically sends itself around, reporting back on what it finds), or he surfs the net himself by issuing commands through his system. Holographic projection and voice commands can lend the activity a visual and interactive feel, but your character's consciousness never connects with the OpNet.

This is equally true with psi powers (specifically the Technokinesis Mode). While your character projects psi energy into a computer system, his consciousness is always separate. Think of it as remote control.

• **Holovision:** A multimedia entertainment unit for home use, this is basically a standard computer with a larger, more advanced holo-projector and better speakers. Tech: Ω, Mass: 15, Cost: ••••

• **HUDset:** This device consists of transluscent goggles on which information is displayed, and an earpiece and subvocal throat microphone. Useful for maintaining privacy in public places or where normal holo display is inappropriate. Often combined with a keyboard. Tech: Ω, Mass: 0.5, Cost: ••

• **Keyboard:** For people who can type faster than they can talk. The standard keyboard unrolls from an internal storage port and becomes rigid for use. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: ••

• **Printer:** Paper is still used frequently as an information medium. Standard machines can print full color, double-sided, and at a rate of 15 pages per minute. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: ••

• **Server:** Servers (also known as mainframes or central processing units) are commonly installed in businesses, government offices and aboard orbital stations and spacecraft. The standard server is a flat box 50 x 50 x 10 cm in size, with 10 kiloblocs, minimum, of internal storage. The processing speed of a server is several orders of magnitude beyond that of personal computers. The agents that operate on these machines have an eerie intelligence (often classified officially as SI systems). Tech: Ω, Mass: 3, Cost: •••••

• **Sound Pack:** Includes an IR/UV laser microphone and a parabolic microphone. Tech: Ω, Mass: 0.5, Cost: ••

• **Splitter:** A small "Y" connector that gives the computer an extra SIO port. SIO connections are universal. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: •

• **Variable Camera:** Greatly enhances a computer's optical camera recording abilities, including telescopic, infra-red, low-light and limited microscopic vision (up to x10). Tech: Ω, Mass: 0.5, Cost: •••

Agents and Avatars

An *agent* is the interface between the user and the computer. It is fully capable of communicating in written or spoken language and interacting with people (leading the socially dysfunctional to believe that agents are independently aware). Every agent interacts in text and voice formats, although holo or screen projection may be limited. An agent can be anything from a simple, emotionless drone to a fully intuitive, dynamic character construct.

An *avatar* is similar to an agent; in fact, the difference between the two is cosmetic. An avatar is a user's own electronic representation. It's common for a person to send an electronically modified image of himself through a vidphone or OpNet line instead of transmitting his normal face. A user's altered self-image may also be slaved to a computer-agent program, effectively creating a computerized clone with which he then interacts. "Agent" and "avatar" are often used interchangeably in common parlance.

Computer agents are almost supporting characters in themselves. They have personalities and skills not unlike those of a player's character, and can be involved in (or even the focus of) roleplaying. An agent is simply a tool, though, a program designed for assistance. While agents have a kind of intelligence, talents and even artificial personalities of sorts, they are not alive nor are they independently thinking creatures.

The functions listed for each agent are merely systems that relate to the agent's programming. The player (or the Storyteller, if she feels it's appropriate) may use a suitable rating as a Dice Pool to "run" a given function. The agent normally runs the function on its own; a character may assist with Engineering, in which case the separate rolls are handled as **Teamwork** (see page 162). Each function is described below.

• **Performance:** This default function is not related to the Perform Ability. Instead, it is the system's general operating capacity. When your character wants his computer to carry out a function, roll this rating as its Dice Pool. Much like a character's Attribute is the base to which Abilities are applied, an agent's Performance is the base rating to which the appropriate Application is added for running a particular process.

• **Application:** Programmed data or system process. Each Application has the same designation as an Ability Specialty, since they cover similar, particular areas of information. If an agent doesn't have the appropriate Application, it defaults to its base Performance to see if it can access relevant information from other files.

Adding an Application to a system is a matter of buying (or pirating) the software. Still, an Application's focus may be subject to Storyteller approval. A standard Application costs • (black-market Applications usually cost much more), and adds one die to the agent's Performance for that function. Applications may be purchased multiple times, adding one die per dot, to reflect more comprehensive files. The Application's degree and any "upgrades" are listed simply as a number after the Application. So, an agent with two Quick Search Applications lists this as "Quick Search 2."

The Performance and standard starting Applications for each agent are listed below. More Applications may be purchased at the costs listed above.

For Example: *Chei Leung taps his minicomp on and the system's agent, a Chris model, flickers into holographic existence. Chei Leung tells the agent (which he's configured to a female and renamed Gerda) to access any schematics she can find on Luxembourg. Gerda asks if she should restrict her search to her own database, or to try to access the OpNet. Chei Leung knows Chris models come with a decent Geography Application, and that the OpNet search could take minutes. Since he doesn't need really detailed information, but wants it right away, Chei Leung tells the agent to search her own database. The Storyteller rolls for the agent (Performance 4, plus Geography 1), for 2, 4, 4, 7 and 0. With two successes, Gerda pulls up information on Luxembourg easily, and projects a small topographical hologram. Chei Leung can then ask Gerda to focus on particular areas for a more comprehensive look at the small nation's geography.*

Computer Agents

• **Alpha Software Chris:** Chris is one of the best agents on the open market. This avatar projects up to a full-body visual, coded to assume either gender. Chris is very responsive, with an excellent talent for predicting the user's needs. The default personality is slightly aggressive and pushy, but adapts over time to best suit the user. Urban legend is rife with stories of people falling in love with Chris. Tech: Ω, Cost: •••

Performance: 4

Applications: Administration 2, Business 1, Design 1, Geography 1, Intent 3, Linguistics 3, Mathematics 3, Quick Search 2

• **Apoderado Estelle "Evita":** A popular female agent with head-only visual projection, often called

"Evita" because of its resemblance to the historic figure. (Apoderado is rumored to have done this intentionally, naming the avatar "Estelle" in a thinly veiled attempt to avoid legal infringements.) Evita has some ability to adapt and anticipate the user's needs, but it is considered slightly obsequious. Tech: Ω, Cost: ••

Performance: 3

Applications: Administration 1, Business 1, Intent 1, Linguistics 2, Mathematics 3, Quick Search 2

• **DataWarp Friday:** The Friday is a highly responsive agent geared toward political functions. While many government functionaries swear by it, Friday has found little acceptance on the open market, presumably due to its fawning yet brusque manner. This agent can project a full-body visual of a smartly dressed politico of the user's choice. Tech: Ω, Cost: ••••

Performance: 5

Applications: Administration 3, Analysis 2, Culture 1, Current Events 2, Diplomacy 1, Geography 1, Intent 3, Linguistics 3, Mathematics 3, Politics 1, Research 2

• **DataWarp Patton:** This agent was one of the first of the "new-era" designs, and still finds extensive use throughout the FSM and other military organizations. While the projection is of a 20th-century American general, Patton has extensive data on every major military mind and tactical analysis of the past three centuries. Although usually quite useful, Patton has been known to cross-reference obscure details at inconvenient times. Tech: Ω, Cost: •••• (Unavailable to commercial markets.)

Performance: 4

Applications: Administration 1, Current Events 1, Geography 3, History 4, Linguistics 3, Mathematics 3, Politics 1, Regulations 3, Tactics 4

• **Orchidware Bill v5.0:** An efficient businessperson's agent, projecting as a head-only visual. Considered indispensable by many executives, Bill is often credited as integral to their success. The v5.0 has a strong ability to anticipate information needs, but its personality remains cool and professional. Tech: Ω, Cost: •••

Performance: 3

Applications: Administration 3, Business 2, Intent 3, Linguistics 2, Mathematics 3, Organization 1, Quick Search 1, Tact 1

• **Wazukana Lt. Bushido:** Lt. Bushido is recognized as one of the most reliable law-enforcement avatars available. Although it uses a significant amount of bloc storage, Lt. Bushido is coded with standard law-enforcement techniques for every major nation. The agent may have up to a full-body projection in the shape of a dapper Nihonjin male (his uniform adjusts itself for the appropriate nation being referenced, defaulting to a Nippon police officer's uniform). Tech: Ω, Cost: •••• (Unavailable to commercial markets.)

Performance: 4

Applications: Administration 2, Geography 1, Intent 2, Law 4, Linguistics 4, Mathematics 3, Regulations 3, Tactics 3

• **Wazukana Personal Assistant:** The "PA" is a basic avatar lacking visual projection. It speaks in a male voice with a Nihonjin accent, no matter what language is coded into the system. The PA does not adapt to its user over time, unlike more advanced agents. Some users find it almost too efficient in its record-keeping. Tech: Ω, Cost: Free with all Wazukana computers, or installed in any brand for a cost of •.

Performance: 2

Applications: Administration 1, Linguistics 1, Mathematics 2

• **Wazukana C- or E-Tech:** This new avatar is geared toward "starter-engineers" or engineering illiterates, and comes in one of two basic packages. C-Tech is designed to assist computer users, while E-Tech is made for mechanics. Wazukana promises to expand the Tech line in the near future to cover other engineering fields. Tech: Ω, Cost: ••••

Performance: 3

Applications (for C-Tech): Computers 3, Electronic Infiltration 2, Intent 1, Linguistics 3, Mathematics 3, Procedures 1, Quick Search 1, Research 2

Applications (for E-Tech): Electronics 3, Intent 1, Linguistics 3, Mathematics 3, Mechanics 2, Procedures 1, Quick Search 1, Research 2

Computers and the Storyteller

Most of the time, computers keep quiet and do what they're told with a simple beep as acknowledgment. Computers are immensely powerful devices, though, and can be used to ruin a storytelling series in a moment of carelessness.

The Storyteller should always remember: When in doubt, it doesn't work. Perhaps the data a character wants isn't available. After all, the OpNet is a mass of isolated, paranoid nodes. Perhaps the avatar misunderstands a request. Despite its humanlike interaction, an agent is still just a program with no imagination, and a literal perception.

Just as importantly, computers shouldn't be played for laughs. A severe Storyteller might have a player's careless "Forget it" cause an agent to wipe out a painstakingly gathered database. While amusing in the abstract, this will serve only to aggravate the players. They shouldn't spend half of each session trying to phrase computer commands just so. While computers are literal, they aren't stupid, especially in the 22nd century.

Yet if something computer related is appropriate to the story, let it work. If players forget a vital clue and the Storyteller has exhausted every option to get them back on track, it's a perfect time for one of their agents to speak up and drop a hint. Computers are far past the point where their actions are predictable, and chaos might as well work in the Storyteller's (and the story's) favor.

Tools

Each piece of hardtech equipment has a S10 port for computer interface, and runs for two years on internal batteries, given normal use.

• **AquaLung:** This bioapp consists of a small, lightweight pack and a biopolymer bubble that fits over the user's head. The pack unfurls long tendrils when immersed in water. The tendrils extract oxygen from the water and process out the wearer's exhaled carbon dioxide.

The semipermeable bubble allows the wearer to drink, eat or even scratch his nose while swimming far below the water's surface. Slow pressure applied against the bubble deforms and finally penetrates it, but the bubble maintains a perfect seal around the penetrating object.

As long as the water lung isn't exposed to hot, still water or other environments that are extremely low in oxygen, it continues to supply breathable air for up to six hours. After that point, the bioapp must rest for at least two hours. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 2, Cost: ••

• **A/V Recording Device (bug):** A combination camera-microphone. A bug can be as small as a pinhead, but if the bug is remote, its broadcast could be detected by scanners or with Electrokinetic powers. A recording device is much more effective if it's tied into a ground line that runs to a computer. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: ••

• **Beacon:** A beacon can be used as a tracking device, or to transmit emergency signals. One can also be set to send only upon receiving a pre-arranged signal. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: •

• **Binoculars:** Computer-stabilized image enhancers permit up to x150 magnification. Also available with low-light and IR enhancement. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: • (regular), ••• (enhanced)

• **Biowelder:** This palm-sized, ovoid bioapp contains thousands of tiny bioapps. The "biobugs" resemble caterpillars whose cilia detect tiny cracks and stress fatigue in struts, bulkheads and other structures. The biobugs inject an organic polymer in fractures, binding the metal's crystalline matrix and effectively re-welding the cracks. Although a biowelder cannot repair major structural breaches nor broken pipes, the bioapp dramatically reduces the likelihood of such a problem occurring if used regularly. A single biowelder can reinforce a five-meter-long stretch of bulkhead.

The device's organic polymer registers starkly different from normal structures on spectral analysis, making it easy for engineers to note the extent of biowelding performed on something, and to replace the original materials when necessary. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 0.5, Cost: •

• **Charger:** A biotech solar and thermal energy collector. It has battery ports in the base, with a flower-like "pod" at the top; the pod unfolds into energy collector panels. The energy absorbed is commonly used to recharge small biotech batteries, or as a backup power supply. Chargers come in single-battery and semiportable-generator models, the latter of which can recharge up to 30 devices or 10 vehicle batteries at one time. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 0.5 (single), 10 (generator), Cost: • (single), ••• (generator)

• **Compass:** This small, hand-held device is a crude but usually effective means to determine direction, based on a planet's magnetic fields. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: •

• **Compass, Inertial/GPS:** This device includes a satellite-dependent Global Positioning System and a self-contained inertial compass. Both are generally combined into a single watch-sized object, and are accurate to within 50 cm. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: ••

Transmissions

"Ground" or "hard" lines, whether to a phone in your character's apartment or to a local OpNet node, utilize optical cables as they have for a century-and-a-half. Cellular and radio transmissions, also known as "air" or "cell" lines, have not changed in function, but their availability is severely restricted. Service fees to start up and maintain a cellular link range from exorbitant to criminal, but it's hard to deny the advantage that portable communication has over ground lines.

Air lines do have practical limitations of their own, though. A transmission's clarity and range may be hindered by a number of variables. Solid objects, including buildings, hills, forests and other dense materials can dramatically reduce effective transmitting range. A message sent into or across space can get lost due to a variety of factors, such as the curvature of the planet, cosmic waves, solar flares and simply stronger transmissions. Then there are artificially generated barriers, such as frequency scrambling devices and electromagnetic pulses.

If the Storyteller feels it is appropriate, she should impose modifiers to transmissions (or even flat-out state that transmissions can't get through). Such difficulties can be attributed to the terrain in which the characters find themselves — it's just as hard to radio up through kilometers of rock and orbital steel from the bowels of the crowded Pit as is to communicate from some remote Martian canyon.

The Storyteller's primary consideration in these instances is always the story. If she feels that the characters' call for backup, a warning signal, or any similar communication attempt would seriously disrupt an otherwise smoothly flowing plot, the answer is simple: The message doesn't get through. As long as the decision makes for a better story, the Storyteller is at liberty to do as she wishes.

• **Computer Detectors:** The favorite device of the privacy-conscious, this palm-sized detector, also called a "sniffer," alerts the user to any active computer within 30 meters. Tech: Ω, Mass: 0.5, Cost: ••

• **Emergency Kit:** A small toolkit. This adds one die to your character's Dice Pool for making repair rolls. Tech: Ω, Mass: 2, Cost: •

• **Essential Security Interfaces (ESI):** Advanced technology makes fooling fingerprint scans and even retinal scans possible. Orgotek therefore designed these testing interfaces as a guaranteed method of confirming authorized personnel.

ESIs are scanners installed in entryways into secure areas, ostensibly to read handprints. The palm scanner is actually a biopolymer plate containing hundreds of monofibrils. These microscopic feelers transmit a blood sample to the organic processing matrix, and put the blood's DNA through a Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism (or RFLP) series.

ESI's organic systems process the test within 15 seconds. The results are checked against the official RFLPs on file. As long as there is a match, the individual gains access to the area.

If the test doesn't match, entrance is denied. Since ESI systems link to security countermeasures, this can result in triggering an audible or silent alarm, lockdown to the entry alcove, the release of stun gas or even a lethal bioelectric surge. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 5, Cost: •••••••

• **Fieldkit:** A small camping kit that includes silverware, a collapsible cup and bowl, waterproof matches, insect repellent and a can opener. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: ••

• **Flashlight:** An efficient halogen flashlight; the face can focus to a pinpoint beam or expand into a small spotlight. Tech: Ω, Mass: 0.5, Cost: •

• **Glucose-Protein Nutritional Packet (GPN or glup pack):** This bioapp was first introduced by BioDyne. Roughly the size of a closed human fist, it generates a glucose-protein paste. The packet splits open like an oyster. The greenish interior is a photosynthesis array that processes ambient water, carbon dioxide and its own nutrients. While not entirely nutritional, the "glup" generated after six hours is enough to feed two grown people for a day. The packet can be stored for up to two years before the bio-organisms inside expire. Once open, a pack creates paste for up to three weeks.

An attachment nodule is available that converts the glucose to ethanol — more an addition for the weekend warrior looking for fermented refreshment than for the serious survivalist. Fruit flavor packs are also available. Tech: Ψ, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (glup pack), • (ethanol nodule)

• **Holefixer:** This small clamshell-shaped bioapp extrudes organic materials that literally plug holes in armor, bulkheads and similar objects. The holefixer can cover an area up to five centimeters in diameter, and the same size in thickness. The shell halves, placed to cover either side of the hole, excrete bacteria onto the surface. The holefixer strips charred surface residue and combines that material with its own organic material to grow an atomic-scale crystal lattice.

The process takes up to 24 hours to repair a large, deep hole (a small hole, millimeters in diameter and depth, takes only 10 minutes to repair). A new holefixer can fill three large holes or up to three dozen small ones. Unlike patch kits that merely plug holes, a holefixer rebuilds an object's natural structure, eliminating the flaw entirely. This bioapp is used extensively by astrominers and other people who operate in a vacuum. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 0.5, Cost: ••

• **Patch Kit:** A polymer paste that, once poured into a hole or armor breach, fills the space and hardens. Patched objects often become stiff and brittle. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: •

• **Static Generator:** A specialized antibug device that's about the size of a phone, and that creates a localized static field (up to a five-meter radius). The static blocks transmissions in or out of the area, and is very difficult to penetrate. Tech: Ω, Mass: 1, Cost: ••

• **Survival Blanket:** A basic bioapp designed to protect the user from harsh environmental conditions. The blanket's exterior is a simple but effective photosynthetic converter, which provides the bioapp itself with nourishment and the user with warmth and comfort. If allowed to rest (rolled up) at least 10 hours each day, a survival blanket lasts up to one year.

The survival blanket can be formatted, thereby attuning itself to the user's biorhythms. A wild fluctuation (say, if the character falls to Incapacitated) while the blanket is within 100 meters triggers the bioware. With mindless determination, it unfolds and drags itself to the individual. The blanket wraps around the person completely, acting as an organic stasis chamber (the character remains at Incapacitated). The blanket maintains stasis for three days, but "dies" afterward — it exhausts its own resources to maintain the user's life. Stasis ends when the user himself opens the blanket or when an outside force (of 3 Strength or greater) peels back the bioapp.

When stored, the survival blanket resembles a tough green fruit that's about seven centimeters across, and it fits easily in a pocket. Unrolling and storing a blanket is involved, but isn't terribly difficult. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 0.5, Tolerance: •, Cost: ••

• **Toolkit:** These kits are available in specialized forms for most technical professions. A toolkit may be purchased separately for each Engineering Specialty, and gives your character two additional dice to repair rolls in the appropriate Specialty. Tech: Ω, Mass: 3, Cost: ••

• **Vocoder:** The vocal translator is a basic ear insert clip that contains between three and 20 language databases. Anything spoken in one of the languages stored in the device translates automatically into the wearer's language of choice. In game terms, a vocoder

acts like an artificial Linguistics Ability, but for hearing only. It doesn't give the user the capacity to speak other languages, only to understand them.

A basic vocoder can interpret and translate a number of language families equal to its cost in dots. Software for more language families must be purchased and installed separately, and within the limits of the vocoder's storage capacity. Nippon restricts inclusion of the Nihonjin language. So, this software isn't available on the open market, and goes for outrageous amounts on the black market. Tech: Ω, Mass: Negligible, Cost: ••• (basic model) up to •••••• •• (high end), Cost: ••• (per language family)

Medical Gear

Medical gear is indispensable, whether hardtech or biotech. You never know when you'll be without a vitakinetic or even a normal medic's assistance.

• **Anti-infection Pad (ant-pad):** A broad-spectrum sterilization patch, placed on the skin over a wound to prevent infection. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (box of 20)

• **Cryogenic Vial (cryal):** A small (4 cm), self-refrigerating vial used to carry fluid samples. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (set of three)

• **Emergency Medical Kit (medkit or EMK):** There's one in every trunk. Each medkit comes with first-aid gear and a basic Wazukana Medicomp I computer filled with medical data that can aid in diagnosis and treatment (Performance 1, Application: First Aid). Successes from the medkit roll are applied as with a **Teamwork** effort (see page 162). Tech: Ω, Mass: 3, Cost: ••

• **HemoChemistat (H-chem):** This biochip, affixed to a vein wall in the patient's bloodstream, analyzes the blood's molecules and cells. A standard biosensor picks up the H-chem's data transmission, giving the attending medical technician a status report on the patient. Practically speaking, the biochip duplicates the effect of the Vitakinetic Kirlian Eye (see page 228). Tech: Ψ, Mass: negligible, Cost: ••

• **Somatic Imaging System (SIS):** The SIS consists of two main bioapps: a clairvoyant sensing apparatus that scans an organism's internal structure, and photokinetic projection gear that generates a holographic image of the scan.

The entire imager is three meters long and egg shaped; the patient slides into the side of the device on a sturdy bio-organic slab. The scan takes roughly five minutes. The system's biocomputer has a port for hardtech chips onto which the holographic scan is stored for later reference. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 500, Cost: ••••• ••

• **Trauma Stabilization Foam (trauma foam or simply "foam"):** A small bio-organic canister about the size of a soda or beer bottle that contains fast-hardening foam. The foam is used to immobilize broken limbs and similar physical trauma until the injury can be treated. A single canister's contents can cover up to four limbs, and sets within 30 seconds.

A foam casing is quite durable, but dissolves into a harmless water-based fluid when sprayed with a solvent stored in the canister's bottom. Trauma foam also breaks away cleanly if scored by a laser scalpel or similar implement. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 0.5, Cost: •

• **Wazukana Medsurgeon II Portable Medical Kit (PMK):** A heavy kit roughly the size of a large suitcase, found in ambulances, most spacecraft and in small infirmaries. The Medsurgeon II has first-aid gear, bandages and a small supply of drugs, as well as a specialized agent to assist in diagnosis and treatment (Performance 3, Applications: Emergency, First Aid, Pharmacy). Successes from the Medsurgeon II's roll are used as a **Teamwork** effort (see page 162). Tech: Ω, Mass: 12, Cost: ••••

• **Wazukana Medsurgeon III Medical Station (medstation or MS):** A semirobotic doctor's assistant, shaped much like a big fireplug. Medstations aren't portable, but are commonly installed in clinics and on large spacecraft. The Medsurgeon III is fully equipped with first-aid gear, bandages, sedatives, stimulants, manipulator arms and a specialized agent (Performance: 4, Applications: Emergency, First Aid, Pharmacy, Surgery). The avatar can attempt treatment if no doctor is present, although it is conservative in the extreme when running on its own (its botches are reduced by one). The medstation's successes are used as a **Teamwork** effort (see page 162), or applied directly to the treatment if there's no one to perform the care. Tech: Ω, Mass: 90, Cost: •••••

Drugs

• **CureAlls:** This popular anti-sickness pill will cure the effects of a cold, flu or most other minor annoyances. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (bottle of 100)

• **Mood Stabilizers:** One pill "clears your thoughts" for up to 30 minutes (adding one die to rolls involving clarity of thought). Two pills cause drowsiness (+2 difficulty on all actions), and three induce sleep for up to two hours. "Moodies" take effect in about five minutes. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (bottle of 100)

• **Stimulants:** One "stim" adds a die to Endurance and Awareness rolls for two hours. After that time, the user suffers +2 difficulty on all actions for another three hours. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (bottle of 100)

• **Tranquilizers:** Each "tranq" knocks out a target for one hour. The subject may suffer from poisoning (see **Poison**, page 255) if she's hit by a number of tranqs greater than her Stamina rating at one time. The standard tranq has a toxin rating of 4. A tranq takes effect in about 30 seconds. Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (per use)

Biotech Augmentation Devices

Some bioapps don't function at all until they're formatted. These *augmentation devices*, also called "ADs," "augies," "enhancers" or "boosters," are highly specialized organisms. Augies interact closely with a psion; some even increase the user's psionic output. An enhancer expands the facility with which

the psion uses his powers, but doesn't endow him with new capabilities.

An enhancer is a highly specialized piece of bioware that interacts closely with the Gifted's psionic aura. The device is designed to operate in synch with the psion's energy, creating a truly symbiotic relationship. Formatting channels this intense psionic interface into a positive resonance. A booster tries to generate psionic resonance with whomever picks it up, even if that person isn't formatted to it. An individual who uses a booster that is not formatted to him may be subject to Tolerance Overload or other interesting psionic effects (the Storyteller can get creative here; the effects don't have to be nasty, though).

In game terms, an enhancer adds dots to your character's Psi or to one of his Modes; it doesn't bestow him with any new powers. The following bioapps must be formatted to the user to function.

• **Astronomical Range Enhancement Sensor (ARES):** The ARES is a greenish, ovoid shell that's large enough for a single adult human to fit into. It sustains itself through photosynthesis and regularly applied nutrient injections. An ARES is installed in a jump ship to complete the clairsentient-to-transport interface.

The clairsentient enters the ARES, equipped with a MARS suit (see below). In fact, the ARES' leaf-like entry panel doesn't open unless it receives a signal from a functioning MARS. Once the psion is inside, the ARES closes and fills with an organic suspension liquid, creating an advanced sensory deprivation tank. The MARS suit provides the psion with gas exchange, waste elimination and nourishment during this time.

The ARES diffuses all external sensory sources, including other psionic effects. Assisted by both the MARS and the suspension liquid's organic resonators, the clairsentient focuses entirely on extending his powers. The psion's long-range sensory capabilities increase dramatically, "becoming" that of the ship itself. Almost in compensation, the clairsentient's close-range ability (say, to look around inside the ship) becomes virtually ineffective.

The ARES has an external safety panel that, if triggered, causes the bioapp to disgorge the psion automatically. The ARES monitors the area for danger so that it doesn't spit the clairsentient into an obviously life-threatening situation (such as during laser fire or loss of life support). Not being a sentient organism, however, the ARES doesn't know the difference between someone simply standing outside the ARES, and an ambush.

The ARES adds three dots to your character's Psi for purposes of determining sensing limits and durations for Psychonavigation and Telesthesia effects. Additionally, the bioapp reduces Psi costs by one (to a minimum of one point). Tech: Ψ, Mass: 2,000, Tolerance: ••, Cost: not available commercially

• **Interface Augmentation Relay:** This useful little bioenhancer boosts an electrokinetic's range. An IA relay is shaped somewhat like a vocoder, although it completely covers the psion's ear when clipped in place. The device interfaces with the user's psionic aura, enhancing his effective range with Electrokinesis.

The IA relay adds one dot to your character's Psi score and two dots to his Electrokinesis Modes for determining his powers' effects (if he doesn't have any dots in a Mode, the device doesn't give him any, nor does it bestow any new powers, it simply increases the strength of his existing Modes). Tech: Ψ, Mass: negligible, Tolerance: ••, Cost: •••

• **Magnified Attunement and Resonant Sensor Suit (MARS):** The MARS enhances Clairsentience. A MARS is a skin-tight bodysuit that forms a three-dimensional network of enhancement points throughout the user's psionic aura. These points, connected like ley lines, resonate with the psion's field.

A MARS suit adds two dots to your character's Psi score and to his Psychonavigation and Telesthesia Modes for determining existing powers' effects (the suit doesn't bestow any additional powers with these extra Mode dots). A MARS suit must be formatted to the user, and its bonuses are cumulative with those provided by an ARES unit when the two devices are used together. Like armor, a MARS can be worn only under appropriate circumstances; it can't be worn to social events and is clumsy to move around in (+2 to difficulty on Dexterity-based rolls). Tech: Ψ, Mass: 10, Tolerance: •••, Cost: •••••

• **Memory Impulse Survey Instrument (MISI):** Telepaths often use a MISI, known as a "mind scanner" to nonpsions, for situations that require finesse, gentleness or excessive force. A scanner, consisting of a matched set of "crowns," enhances the telepath's ability to forge a mental link with a subject.

The telepath focuses through the crown he wears to the one worn by the subject. The coupling magnifies the telepath's capacity to sift through the subject's memories and helps bypass mental blocks erected by natural or artificial means.

Although the MISI's physical housing is of simple, almost graceful design, most people find its appearance ominous. The bioapp's surface is usually dark, to protect the sensitive psi organisms within from light. The crown ripples slightly, appearing to breathe when in use.

The MISI adds two dots to both a telepath's Psi rating and to the effective strength of the Mindshare Mode (no new powers are gained from the increased Mode score). The device also reduces the Psi point cost of using Mindshare powers by one point (to a minimum of one). The MISI must be formatted to the user to gain these benefits. Tech: Ψ, Mass: 0.5, Tolerance: •••, Cost: •••••

Transportation

All vehicles are assumed to be equipped with on-board computers, dedicated agents, global-positioning systems, cellular links (for emergency use

only), climate control, and anti-theft systems. More sophisticated vehicles have computer-supported maneuvering systems.

Unless specified otherwise, all ground vehicles are powered by solar or electric batteries (and commonly have small solar, backup batteries). A standard battery runs for up to 12 hours at continuous cruising speed, or four hours at top speed before needing to be recharged. A backup battery goes for another hour at cruising speed. It's not uncommon for people to store a spare charged battery in the trunk. A driver can also recharge his vehicle's battery at a fueling station. It takes 20 minutes to bring a dead battery up to full charge. For those in a hurry, exchanging a dead battery for a fully charged one takes only a few minutes. Charging costs half as much as does exchanging.

Air and space vehicles are powered by hyper-fusion reactors, giving them virtually unlimited range and flight capability. A reactor requires weekly maintenance to keep it in prime working condition. The Storyteller should feel free to degrade a craft's performance if the characters don't make an effort to keep it running properly.

Biotech Vehicles

Virtually all biotech vehicles use hardtech engines as their primary propulsion systems. Human-made, bio-organic power systems are still inferior to hyper-fusion or even to large solar batteries.

The biotech propulsion systems that are in use generate power through photosynthesis, and can run indefinitely, barring mishaps. Biotech batteries are used as backup in case of such breakdown. The maximum speed of biotech engines is only half of that of comparable hardtech systems. Orgotek claims to have a superior biotech engine, based on Qin biotechnology, in the final stages of testing.

A biotech vehicle's exterior composition (though not necessarily appearance) is much like that of a crab: lightweight, solid and resilient. Vehicle bioarmor consists of multiple organic layers. Hardtech armor isn't usually mounted on a biotech craft, because it hinders the vehicle's movement and responsiveness.

Vehicle Damage

Every vehicle has eight Structural Levels, much like your character has eight Health Levels. As a vehicle takes damage, its structural integrity is reduced until it is destroyed (and may blow up in the process). A vehicle's performance is reduced as it takes damage.

The chart below lists Structural Levels, along with vehicles' relative status at each level. The dice penalty listed is subtracted from your character's Driving/Piloting and Firearms rolls, reflecting the in-

creasing degree of difficulty involved in holding the vehicle on course and getting its systems to respond. These modifiers apply until repairs are made. Vehicle damage is noted with a "X," as with Lethal damage (see **The Health Chart**, page 251, for further details on applying damage).

Structural Level	Dice Penalty	Description
Scraped	0	Slight scoring and dents; nothing significant.
Dented	- 1	Minor structural damage; not seriously impaired.
Battered	- 1	Serious structural damage; top speed is limited to cruising speed.
Smashed	- 2	Significant damage; cruising speed is halved.
Breached	- 3	Structurally unsound, the vehicle is a death trap.
Wrecked	- 4	Only basic systems function; speed is minimal.
Broken down		The craft is one step from being scrap metal. It cannot perform any maneuvers and has no power.
Demolished		The vehicle is destroyed completely (the Storyteller may have it disintegrate, explode or simply fall apart).

Repairing Vehicle Damage

A craft must be repaired before it returns to prime working condition. Fixing a vehicle's structural damage takes time, tools and appropriate parts. Minimal damage may be repaired using existing parts, but damage beyond Battered requires replacement materials. Vehicles at Breached or lower must be taken to an appropriate maintenance facility (repair shop, space dock) to have access to necessary repair equipment.

Recovering each Structural Level requires a successful Engineering roll. The repair times listed below are cumulative. A Dented hybrid craft takes four hours to fix, while a Smashed skimmer takes almost a day to repair.

Structural Level	Repair Time
Scraped	One hour
Dented	Three hours
Battered	Six hours
Smashed	12 hours
Breached	One day
Wrecked	Three days
Broken down	One week
Demolished	It's scrap, remember?

If repairs are made using superior skill (4 Engineering rating) and equipment, repair time is moved one category higher on the repair chart (to a minimum of one hour).

Vehicle Codes

A series of codes designates each vehicle's vital statistics. These ratings aren't relevant for all craft; if a vehicle doesn't have a given code, it's assumed that it doesn't have that capability. The ratings are as follows:

VT: Vehicle type. This is useful for understanding the craft's maneuvering capabilities and the relevant Specialty used to pilot it.

Tech: Technology type. Whether the vehicle is of hardtech (Ω) or biotech (Ψ) design.

CS: Cruising speed. The vehicle's standard atmospheric rate of speed.

TS: Top speed. The craft's maximum atmospheric velocity.

VS: Vacuum speed. The craft's maximum possible extraterrestrial velocity (see **Speed in Space**, below).

Handling: Some vehicles have computer-support systems and superior designs that aid drivers or pilots in steering. This rating lists the number of dice that are added to Drive or Pilot rolls with the craft.

Mass: The vehicle's mass rating, listed in metric tons.

Tolerance: The craft's Tolerance rating if formatted (for biotech only).

Cost: The vehicle's price on the open market.

Armor: The vehicle's armor rating (if any), listed with the Defense Add. "Unarmored" vehicles have an armor rating of 1 [3].

Weapons: The craft's standard armaments (if any). Vehicle weapons have Accuracy and Damage listings. The former represents the computer-guidance system that supports the gunner's targeting. The latter indicates the weapon's Lethal damage effect, including damage add.

Ground Vehicles

Ground transports consist of a mix of wheeled vehicles and skimmers (advanced, skirtless hovercraft). The latter are generally used for personal transportation only

Formatted Biotech Vehicles

Formatting a biotech vehicle to a psion unlocks a number of functions and integrates pilot and craft into seamless unity.

A vehicle's maneuverability improves noticeably with formatting. A hovercycle's steering system or a biofighter's thrusters respond directly to the pilot's desires. Your character is essentially hooked into the vehicle's nervous system, and no longer needs to think consciously about controlling the craft. The vehicle becomes his body, an extension of himself. Motion, velocity, turning and orientation all become instinctual, just as if your character himself were to turn or move.

Psions with previous training in hardtech vehicles, and who format biotech ones to themselves, can find it difficult to control the unique craft. Much of their previous training involves actions contrary to the synthesis of human and bioware. These pilots and drivers must unlearn what they've been taught before they can utilize biocraft to their full potential.

due to weight considerations, and are expensive. Conductor-laced roadways permit the use of magnetic levitation or "maglev" vehicles in well-maintained urban areas.

Hover vehicles

• **Banji Zephyr:** A high-priced, two-seat convertible sports skimmer from the Nihonjin metacorporation Banji. It is equipped with an "active" frame and suspension, providing excellent handling in urban environments.

VT: Hover
Tech: Ω
CS: 120 km/h
TS: 260 km/h
Handling: +2
Mass: 1
Cost: •••••••

• **Bisai Assault Skimmer:** Designed for military actions involving fast ground assaults and equally quick withdrawals. The Bisai uses heavy-duty turbines and geo-stabilizers to support the vehicle's armor and weaponry. It seats one pilot, one gunner, and up to two others.

VT: Hover
Tech: Ω
CS: 90 km/h
TS: 170 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 8
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 4 [10]
Weapons: Turret-mounted, medium laser (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 6d10 [5] L)

• **ClinTech Warden LAV (Light-Armored Vehicle):** Essentially an armored skimmer, the Warden has become the standard police patrol vehicle for most Western nations and Lunar station sectors. The two-seat forward cab has a clear-armor panel (2 [5]) that separates it from the rear section. The turret laser is controlled from inside the vehicle.

VT: Hover
Tech: Ω
CS: 110 km/h
TS: 205 km/h
Handling: +2
Mass: 1.5
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 3 [5]
Weapons: Turret-mounted, light laser (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 5d10 [5] L)

• **Orgotek Hummingbird:** This sleek biotech hovercycle has received praise for its dynamic styling and responsiveness. The vehicle combines a lightweight yet sturdy organic frame with an efficient hardtech turbine system. Ratings are for an unformatted version; if formatted to the driver, the Hummingbird adds three additional dice to Handling.

VT: Hover
Tech: Ψ
CS: 140 km/h
TS: 250 km/h
Handling: +1
Mass: 0.5
Tolerance: ••
Cost: •••••

• **Reed Rosen Brougham:** A luxury skimmer that seats up to six (four comfortably). Almost 90% of units sold over the past decade have had the optional light-armor security package.

VT: Hover
Tech: Ω
CS: 110 km/h
TS: 210 km/h
Handling: +1
Mass: 1.5
Cost: •••••• (standard), ••••••• (armored)
Armor: 3 [5] (optional)

• **Reed Rosen Tsunami Hovercycle:** This tiny, exposed-seat skimmer is considered dangerous, fast, and a symbol of the rebel. The Tsunami is normally a one-person vehicle, but it can seat two.

VT: Hover
Tech: Ω
CS: 150 km/h
TS: 270 km/h
Handling: +2
Mass: 0.5
Cost: •••••

• **Shendai AirFoil:** The ubiquitous mid-range skimmer for the cost conscious. The AirFoil seats four comfortably in an enclosed cab.

VT: Hover
Tech: Ω
CS: 100 km/h

Optional Rule: Vehicles as "Extras"

Vehicle combat can take some time to resolve when all craft have eight Structural Levels. If the Storyteller wants to make vehicle combat fast paced, craft that are insignificant to the plot should be assigned only four Structural Levels [Dented -1, Breached -3, Broken down and Demolished]. Such vehicles are used to create cinematic effect, are piloted by nameless goons, and are under the direction of the powerful forces whom the characters are after. See **Optional Rule: Extras**, page 251, for more details.

The Storyteller may also wish to take things a step further, giving small craft four Structural Levels when battling significantly larger vehicles (e.g., a hovercycle against a tank, or a hybrid fighter against a frigate).

TS: 190 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 1
Cost: ●●●●●

• **Shendai LightRider:** A typical hovercycle, the LightRider seats two and has a sizable "trunk" located under the seats.
VT: Hover
Tech: Ω
CS: 140 km/h
TS: 210 km/h
Handling: +1
Mass: 0.5
Cost: ●●●●

Wheeled vehicles

Wheeled vehicles are all-wheel drive and all-wheel steering.

• **ClinTech Morris APC (Armored Personnel Carrier):** Also known as "The Box," this no-frills military transport is designed to carry troops into areas that air transport can't (or won't) enter. The Box also fulfills standard troop-transfer duties. It has a cab with room for four, a dual-battery system and bay space for one 20-man squad.
VT: Wheeled
Tech: Ω
CS: 125 km/h
TS: 200 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 7
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 4 [5]
Weapons: Turret-mounted, light laser cannon (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 5d10 [5] L)

• **Concurso MH-1 Hauler:** This is a general-purpose cargo vehicle with dual batteries. The cab seats four, and the bay, which is available open or closed, has 10 cubic meters of cargo space.
VT: Wheeled
Tech: Ω
CS: 125 km/h
TS: 190 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 6
Cost: ●●●●● ●

• **Concurso T-10 Minihauler:** A light yet durable truck, the T-10 is a versatile two-seat, light transport vehicle for private or commercial use. The Mini's three-cubic-meter cargo bay is available open or closed.
VT: Wheeled
Tech: Ω
CS: 120 km/h
TS: 230 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 3
Cost: ●●●●●

• **Davidson-Wheeler American Motorcycle:** A triumph of vintage mechanics in the modern age, the American is a traditional motorcycle design constructed with the latest orbital alloys. It seats two and has an engine converter system that emits the bike's trademark deep-throated rumble.
VT: Wheeled
Tech: Ω
CS: 180 km/h
TS: 310 km/h
Handling: +1
Mass: 0.5
Cost: ●●●●●

• **Mashindano Sentry:** This small, reliable four-seat sedan from African auto manufacturer Mashindano is one of the most popular cars among the upper-middle class.
VT: Wheeled
Tech: Ω
CS: 120 km/h
TS: 250 km/h
Handling: +1
Mass: 1
Cost: ●●●●●

• **Mashindano Kuchuka Bronto:** The Bronto is a heavy transcontinental cargo vehicle, powered by a built-in fusion engine. An optional package provides armor to its three-seater cab and to its 120-cubic-meter enclosed cargo bay, and includes a coilgun. This package has virtually become standard equipment.
VT: Wheeled
Tech: Ω
CS: 135 km/h
TS: 215 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 7
Cost: ●●●●●● (standard), ●●●●●●● (armored)
Armor: 3 [5] (optional)
Weapons: Turret-mounted, light coilgun (Accuracy: 0, Damage: 6d10 [10] L)

• **Porter-Andersen Zenith:** The Zenith is a top-selling North American four-seat sedan. It has faced stiff competition from the Mashindano Sentry over the past few years.
VT: Wheeled
Tech: Ω
CS: 130 km/h
TS: 265 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 1.5
Cost: ●●●●●

Other vehicles

• **Checker Maglev Cab:** This is a cheap and common form of transportation for those urban areas with magrail lines installed in the streets. The standard Checker has a vintage design with all of the modern conveniences, and it seats four.
VT: Maglev

Tech: Ω
CS: 80 km/h
TS: 140 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 1
Cost: •••••

• **ClinTech Osner ATV (All-Terrain Vehicle):** The backbone of any army, the tank is still ubiquitous on the battlefield, even in the 22nd century. Although the Osner is slower than Mashindano's C-111, its formidable firepower and armament make it a supremely effective combat machine. The tank seats a commander, driver, two gunners and up to four others.

VT: Track
Tech: Ω
CS: 80 km/h
TS: 160 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 50
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 6 [10]
Weapons: Turret-mounted, heavy coilgun (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 8d10 [10] L); retractable, turret-mounted, light laser cannon (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 5d10 [5] L); three smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L)

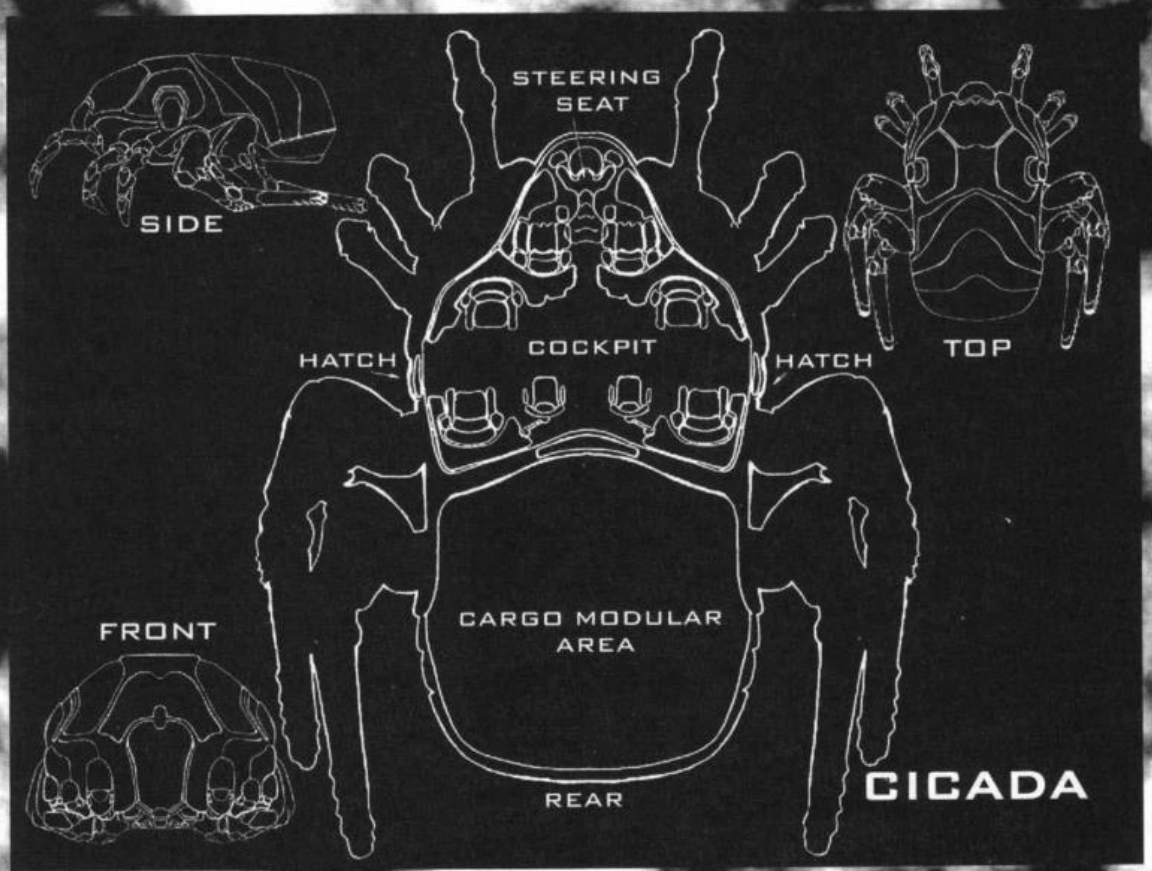
• **Mashindano Rover:** This small, tracked cargo vehicle is popular in Outback regions. The cab seats two and the two-cubic-meter cargo bay is available open or capped.

VT: Track
Tech: Ω
CS: 90 km/h
TS: 160 km/h
Handling: 0
Mass: 2
Cost: ••••

• **Orgotek Cicada ATV (All-Terrain Vehicle):** This biotech hauler is a common sight on Mars, and has been introduced successfully to Terran markets. The Cicada's basic design has a forward cab and leg assembly. The cab seats a pilot, a co-pilot and up to six passengers comfortably. The Cicada's "crawler" locomotion is generally automatic, handled by the driver. However, it has a small "leg driver" seat, enabling a pilot to direct each individual leg when precise control is needed (on rough terrain, during cargo loading, in combat).

The Cicada normally clamps over a heavy turbine hoversled (not unlike the model used on the Bisai Assault Skimmer), providing additional lift support and speed. The removable ten-cubic-meter cargo pod is used for standard hauling and even as a small camper, although attaching it reduces the vehicle's speed considerably. The list below provides unformatted ratings; a formatted Cicada adds two more dice to Handling rolls.

VT: Crawler/Hover



Tech: Ψ

CS: 140 km/h (without pod), 110 km/h (without pod or hoversled), 100 km/h (with pod and hoversled)

TS: 220 km/h (without pod), 180 km/h (without pod or hoversled), 150 km/h (with pod and hoversled)

Handling: +1 (without pod), +2 (without pod or hoversled), 0 (with pod)

Mass: 3 (without pod), 2.5 (without pod or hoversled), 5 (with pod)

Tolerance: ••

Cost: •••••

• **Orgotek Mantis CL (Cargo Lifter):** The Mantis is a small, durable biotech cargo lifter modeled on the design of the Cicada. Its small cab seats a single pilot, but has room for one other person to crouch uncomfortably. The cab itself rests on top of four maneuverable legs, and has four additional lifting legs (two powerful ones for actual lifting, and two for stabilizing a load).

Many spaceports and an increasing number of shipping companies maintain these vehicles. The list below provides unformatted ratings; a formatted Mantis adds two more dice to Handling rolls.

VT: Crawler

Tech: Ψ

CS: 80 km/h

TS: 110 km/h

Handling: +2

Mass: 1.5

Tolerance: ••

Cost: ••••

Aircraft

Passenger flights of over 3000 km in distance are staged by semiballistic liners. These planes spend most of their voyages in the ionosphere, essentially in a low orbit. They carry several hundred high-paying passengers, and can make a trans-Pacific flight in only three or four hours. Military escorts are not uncommon given the Aberrant threat.

• **Banji Cirrus:** A luxurious passenger liner, Banji's flagship semiballistic craft is used exclusively by African and Australian transport companies. It requires a pilot, co-pilot and a navigator, and seats 200 passengers very comfortably.

VT: Jet

Tech: Ω

CS: Mach 2 (100 km altitude)

TS: Mach 2.1

Handling: +1

Mass: 200

Cost: ••••• •••• (vehicle), ••• (ticket)

• **ClinTech "Black Cat" Military Transport:** This long-range transport consists of a piloting frame with interchangeable cargo pods. The piloting frame is designed for a pilot, co-pilot and a gunner, with room for three others. While the Black Cat carries primarily troop-transport pods (which house up to two 20-man squads, each), it can also hook up to weapons, vehicle-transport, field-command, communications or cargo pods.

VT: Jet

Tech: Ω

CS: 950 km/h (without pod), 700 km/h (with pod)

TS: Mach 1 (without pod), 1000 km/h (with pod)

Handling: +1 (without pod), 0 (with pod)

Mass: 35 (without pod), 100 (with pod)

Cost: Not available commercially

Armor: 3 [5]

Weapons: Turret-mounted, light laser cannon (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 5d10 [5] L); four smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L)

• **L-B 878 Ionoliner:** The current rival of the Cirrus, the 878 is a common sight on the San Francisco-Tokyo and Cairo-Perth hops. L-B's Ionoliner carries 230 passengers in style.

VT: Jet

Tech: Ω

CS: Mach 2 (100 km altitude)

TS: Mach 2.15

Handling: +1

Mass: 240

Cost: ••••• •••• (vehicle), ••• (ticket)

Spacecraft

It's been said that a pilot is only as good as his craft. Conversely, a good craft can make up for a mediocre pilot. Certain components are vital to all spacecraft, from hybrids to frigates to freighters.

Astrogation System

Unless a ship is quite near a planet, orbital station or other fixed object, there is no "horizon" or gravity to use as a guide during space flight. This is even more significant in combat situations, during which two or more craft zigzag in three dimensions simultaneously, trying to get a lock on one another without a common point of reference. Even the best fighter pilot can find it difficult to orient himself properly without a guidance system. The Storyteller should bear this in mind when applying difficulties to space combat maneuvering.

Flight Chair

Thrust applies force to anyone on a spacecraft. Acceleration and centripetal force are significant factors in flight, since both can apply an active gravitational force, even though no external gravity source exists. Velocity or vector changes themselves create force. The harder a vector change or the longer that thrusters fire, the greater the force that's applied.

Military flight chairs are designed to reduce the effects of this high stress. A pilot is strapped in by a flight chair's suspension webbing, and a chair is filled with shock-absorbing gel. A pilot's flightsuit is also padded much like a chair is. Furthermore, ships have automated systems that flush extra oxygen into a pilot's breathing mix to keep him from blacking out even as

applied force crushes air from his lungs.

This design is standard for all seats in combat ships. Commercial vessels aren't quite as well-equipped. Non-military craft aren't as maneuverable as high-performance military ships, though, so basic flight chairs and strap systems are usually sufficient for civilian vessels.

Life-Support System

A ship's life-support system keeps the crew from suffering the effects of brutally cold temperatures, oxygen deprivation and pressure extremes. Some spacecraft have separate, redundant backup systems for the pilot in case the main life support and its backup fail.

MSYS

Maneuvering safety monitoring systems, referred to as "MSYS," are standard in all crafts. These automatic measures prevent the pilot from overwhelming himself and his passengers with the applied forces of a severe maneuver. Hotshots push this envelope routinely to see how close to the edge they can cut it. Some of the best space pilots have been known to bypass MSYS fail-safes, flying entirely on instinct.

Power Plant

A ship's heart is its power plant. Without it, a spacecraft would be nothing more than a hunk of salvage. Hyper-fusion reactors power space ships' various functions. Some large craft are equipped with multiple fusion engines for increased power, backup or both. Small ships, such as fighters, hybrids and patrol craft, rely on solar-battery arrays for their backup power.

Thrusters

Thrusters are used to maneuver a ship, sending it in the desired direction and enabling the pilot to avoid debris and enemy attacks. A ship with damaged thrusters is not simply slow, but it maneuvers like a wounded cow. Combat is no place for malfunctioning or dead thrusters (unless they're on an opponent's ship). A craft that can't maneuver is a sitting duck. However, a good pilot can at least limp a craft with damaged thrusters to a nearby station for repairs.

Speed in Space

Listing specific rates of speed for traveling in the vastness of space involves a degree of detail that isn't necessary to enjoy this game. To simplify play, a spacecraft's top vacuum speed, or "VS," is an artificially derived rating.

Velocity in space is listed on a scale of one to five. Obviously, the higher a vehicle's rating, the shorter the travel time to its destination. A ship with a high rating can accelerate (and decelerate) more quickly than can one with a low rating, thereby covering the same distance in a shorter period of time. A ship with a high rating can also travel at a slower rate of speed by stopping acceleration at any time. All spacecraft's standard cruising speed for maneuvering and short-distance travel is VS 2 (slower craft are restricted to a lower rating, of course).

Most ships operate at low ratings for a couple of reasons. Running a ship's engines at peak capacity on a constant basis causes advanced wear and tear on the entire craft, especially on the passengers and crew. High-velocity stresses can cause blackouts and even physical damage. The ratings listed below take into account adjusting velocities to within human safety tolerances.

Ships also travel at moderate speeds to offer more time to respond to external factors. While this isn't necessarily important when traveling from Earth to Mars, maneuvering between all of the satellites and orbital stations in Earth's orbit is another matter. The Storyteller may impose difficulties to a ship's performance if its crew isn't used to high-velocity maneuvering, or if the pilot routinely pushes the vessel to its limits without maintenance.

VS	Average Distance Covered
1	Very slow; Earth to Luna in one day; Earth to Mars in six months
2	Slow; Earth to Luna in 12 hours; Earth to Mars in three months
3	Average; Earth to Luna in six hours; Earth to Mars in one month
4	Fast; Earth to Luna in three hours; Earth to Mars in two weeks
5	Very fast; Earth to Luna in one hour, 30 minutes; Earth to Mars in seven days

Hybrid craft are listed with atmospheric cruising and top speeds because they can travel in an atmosphere and in space.

Hybrids

F-HVTR (Fusionjet High-Velocity Tilt Rotor), or "hybrid," craft are designed for space and atmospheric flight. They range in size from the 12-meter-long E-15 Fighter to the 45-meter-long L-B Comet. Hybrids comprise the majority of orbital traffic, and handle most short atmospheric hops (such flights are less luxurious and expensive than are semiballistic transports).

• **Bakuhatsu E-15 Fighter:** Designed under military contract, the E-15 is used mostly for orbital and e2m (Earth-to-Moon) escort duties. Seats one pilot and one gunner, with a small two-cubic-meter cargo bay.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ω
CS: Mach 2
TS: Mach 2.1
VS: 4
Handling: +3
Mass: 20
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 4 [5]
Weapons: Heavy laser cannon (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 8d10 [5] L); four smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L)

• **Bakuhatsu GPT-03 "Trey" (General-Purpose Transport):** The Trey is the top-selling commercial

transport hybrid. It requires a crew of three, and has quarters for up to 12, and a 80-cubic-meter cargo bay.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ω
CS: Mach 1.3
TS: Mach 1.6
VS: 3
Handling: +1
Mass: 55
Cost: ●●●●● ●●●
Armor: 3 [10]
Weapons: Dual medium laser cannons (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 6d10 [5] L)

• **Banji Raven II:** A common hybrid craft, the Raven is suited for light cargo or passenger duties. Seats four in the cockpit (only two are needed to pilot the craft), and has room for either 50 cubic meters of cargo or 20 passengers.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ω
CS: Mach 1
TS: Mach 1.1
VS: 3
Handling: +1
Mass: 30
Cost: ●●●●● ●● (vehicle), ●● (ticket)

• **Banji Falcon:** This cargo craft trails the Bakuhatsu Trey in recent sales, but remains one of the most reliable hybrids available. Seats four in the cockpit (two pilots), with quarters for up to eight, and 70 cubic meters for cargo.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ω
CS: Mach 1.25
TS: Mach 1.5
VS: 4
Handling: +2
Mass: 40
Cost: ●●●●● ●●●
Armor: 3 [10]
Weapons: Medium laser cannon (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 6d10 [5] L)

• **L-B Comet OPS (Orbital Passenger Shuttle):** The Earth-to-orbit trip takes under an hour on these delta-winged needles, with orbital stations and Luna itself only a few hours away. Such trips commonly receive fighter escort. Comets seat 150 in opulent comfort. The craft are extremely valuable, and not normally found in private hands.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ω
CS: Mach 2.1
TS: Mach 2.2
VS: 4
Handling: +2
Mass: 280
Cost: ●●● (ticket)

• **L-B MEL (Military Equipment Lifter):** The MEL is a military workhorse used in combat for dropping tanks and troops in hostile zones. It requires one pilot, one co-pilot, and one gunner, and has a respectable 300-cubic-meter cargo capacity. A civilian version that comes without the weapons package (titled unimaginatively "NEL," or Nonmilitary Equipment Lifter), is now in vogue on Luna.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ω
CS: Mach 1.1
TS: Mach 1.3
VS: 2
Handling: 0
Mass: 200
Cost: ●●●●● ●●● (NEL; the MEL isn't available commercially)
Armor: 5 [10]
Weapons: Turret-mounted, heavy coilgun (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 8d10 [10] L)

• **Orgotek Locust Fighter C:** Whether used to ward off Aberrant raids from the fringes of settled space, to repel pirates from standard trade routes, or to oppose a government's aggression along the stellar frontier, the single-occupant Locust is a formidable fighter craft.

Hardtech propulsion systems integrated into a bio-organic chassis create a powerful and highly responsive vehicle. Legionnaires have been known to make personalized adjustments, such as PK enhancers to harmonize a pilot's Aptitude more fully with his Locust's capabilities. Unformatted statistics are listed below. Formatting adds two more dice to the Locust's Handling and to all weapon Accuracy ratings.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ψ
CS: Mach 2
TS: Mach 2.1
VS: 4
Handling: +2
Mass: 22
Tolerance: ●●●●
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 4 [5]
Weapons: Dual medium laser cannons (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 6d10 [5] L); front-mounted, light coilgun (Accuracy: 0, Damage: 5d10 [10] L); four smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L)

Biotech Cockpit

A biofighter uses a variety of conventional methods, like those described for hardtech ships, to support and protect its pilot. However, bio-organic design allows for a unique feature: If the organism (ship) dies, an organic tissue mass encloses and sustains the pilot, as well as the communications and manual controls. This organic shell protects the pilot better than any hardtech support system could, although even its lifespan is limited.

Frigates

Frigates are true "starships" — craft designed entirely for operation in space. Frigates are not made for atmosphere or for landing; instead, they dock with orbital stations and use shuttles and hybrids for planetfall. Frigates are smaller and more heavily armed than are freighters, and are used primarily for travel near disputed territories.

Frigates are hundreds of meters in length, with an average 2,000-cubic-meter cargo capacity and a docking bay. The bay can house two escort fighters or one mid-size hybrid transport, although some frigates have been overhauled extensively to turn their cargo bays into additional docking platforms. Frigates are equipped with exterior docking ports for up to six hybrid craft.

Small frigates have individual quarters for 30, with bunk space for an additional 150. A minimum crew of 10 is required to maintain vital frigate functions, such as piloting, astrogation, engineering and life support. However, a crew of 100, operating in shifts, is required to utilize a frigate's full maneuvering and weapons capabilities. Large frigates have larger crews, and significantly more cabins.

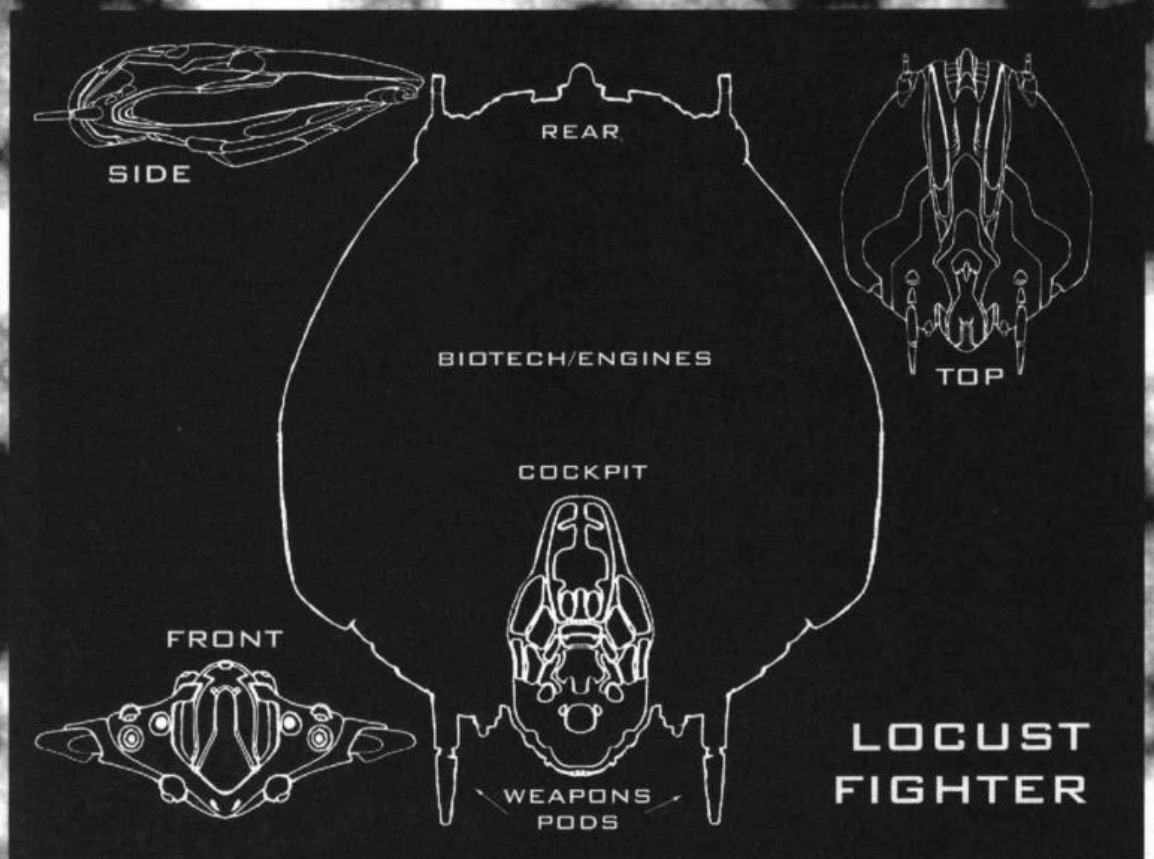
Frigates are used as patrol and military craft, policing spacelanes and colony borders against hostile incursions (whether by Aberrants, enemy nations or corporations, or new menaces). Some frigates make commercial intrasystem runs to Mars, Venus, orbital stations and even to Io. Passenger "suites" are usually converted officers' quarters. Although frigates are not as luxurious as freighters are, most passengers feel that a frigate's armaments make up for this shortcoming.

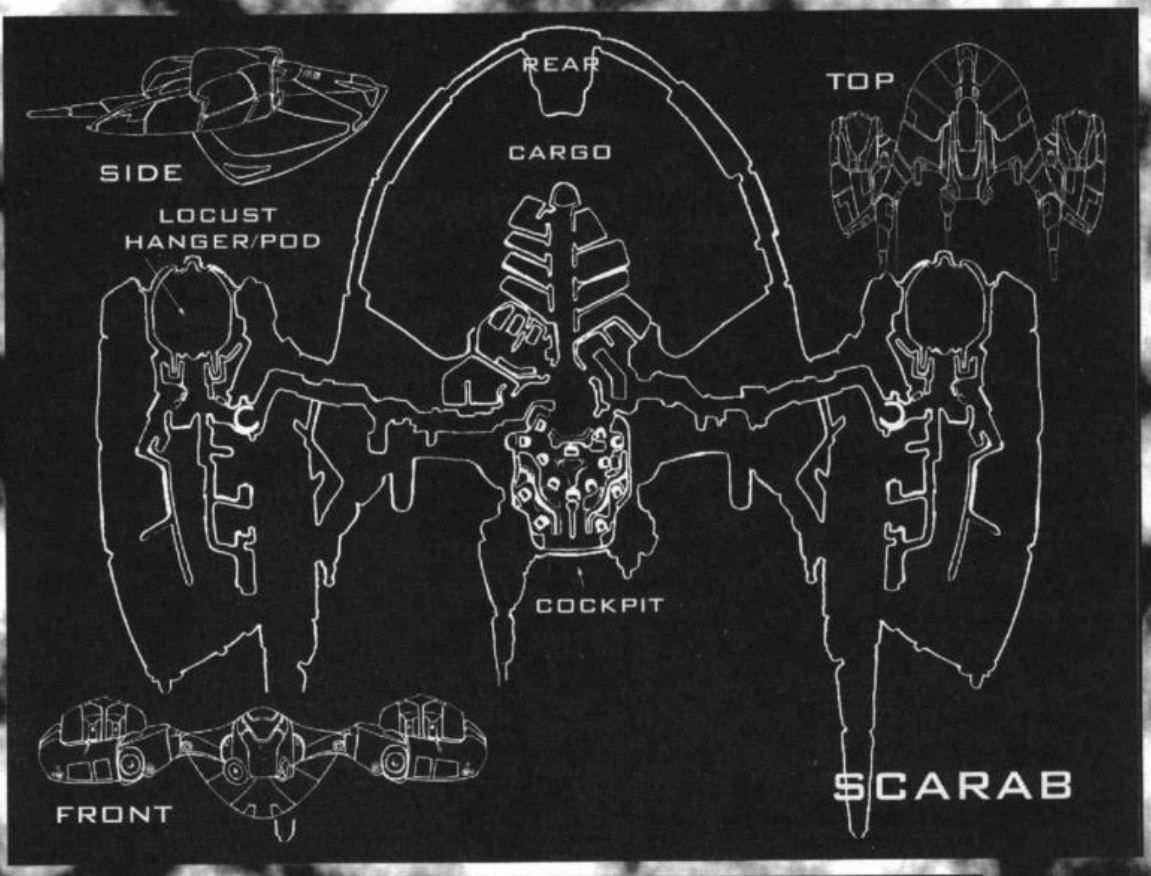
• **Banji Kestrel IV:** Although other nations have a few in their fleets, the deadly Kestrel is recognized as the Federated States Military's signature frigate. A 280-meter juggernaut, Banji's premiere frigate is a common sight on the spacelanes.

VT: Frigate
Tech: Ω
VS: 5
Handling: 0
Mass: 60,000
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 7 [15]

Weapons: 10 turret-mounted, heavy laser cannons (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 8d10 [5] L); four heavy coilguns (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 8d10 [10] L); three missile bays with a total 90 smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L); eight fusion warheads (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 18d10 [30] L)

• **L-B Supernova IPF-Delta (Intrasystem Patrol Frigate):** Since its introduction 30 years ago, the Supernova class has set the tone for China's domination of space. The Delta is the latest update on the classic model, a mere 190 meters in length with not a centimeter of wasted space.





VT: Frigate
Tech: Ω
VS: 5
Handling: +1
Mass: 35,000
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 6 [15]
Weapons: 14 turret-mounted, heavy laser cannons (Accuracy: +4, Damage: 8d10 [5] L); two light coilguns (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 6d10 [10] L); four heavy coilguns (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 8d10 [10] L); four missile bays with a total 60 smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L); 12 fusion warheads (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 18d10 [30] L)

• **Orgotek Scarab Strike Frigate:** Tiny compared to hardtech frigates, the Scarab holds its own on the spacelanes nonetheless. Handling the ship's key functions requires a crew of only five, although the central bridge is designed for 10, in addition to the two lower gunnery bays which hold two people each. Eight small double-bunk cabins, a galley, a head and a sick bay are set to either side of the central corridor that leads from the bridge to a small 200-cubic-meter cargo hold in the Scarab's underside. The Scarab's side pods each house a single fighter (either a Locust or an E-15).

The Scarab makes up for in maneuverability what it lacks in size. Due to its relatively small, 80-meter length and compact design, this biotech frigate can planetfall (although it needs a large landing pad).

The codes below detail an unformatted Scarab. Formatting the entire craft isn't possible. A character must format to each specific function, instead. Formatting the piloting system adds two more dice to the Scarab's Handling, while formatting its weapons systems adds two more dice to Accuracy, but your character must format each separately to get the benefits of both.

VT: Frigate
Tech: Ψ
CS: Mach 1.2
TS: Mach 1.3
VS: 5
Handling: +2
Mass: 10,000
Tolerance: •••••
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 5 [15]
Weapons: Six forward-mounted, heavy laser cannons (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 8d10 [5] L); dual fore- and aft-mounted, light coilguns (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 6d10 [10] L); two missile bays with a total 40 smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L); two fusion warheads (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 18d10 [30] L)

Freighters

The freighter is the true behemoth of the spaceways, carrying equipment, cargo and people in bulk. A freighter is designed purely for space travel, using shuttles for transport to planets. A typical freighter dwarfs even the largest frigate in size, but its weapons barely match those of even a hybrid.

The standard freighter has two 3,000-cubic-meter cargo bays, an internal docking platform suitable for four escort fighters or two mid-size hybrid transports, and exterior docking points for up to 10 hybrid ships.

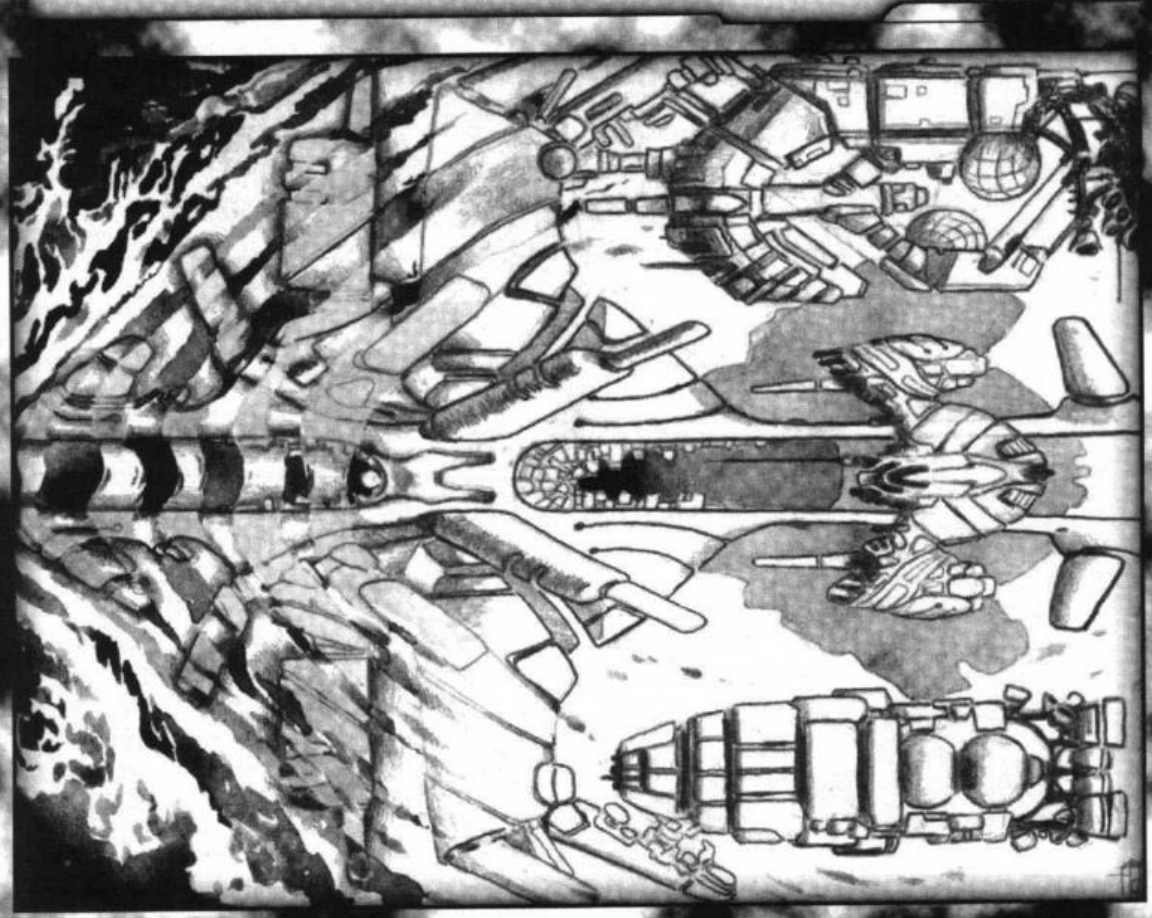
Each freighter is highly automated, needing a crew of only 10 to control the ship. Standard ship's complement is 30, though, allowing for shift rotation and extra duties, with an equal number of individual quarters. Intrastellar luxury liners are made from converted freighters; one of the cargo bays is converted into quarters. Typically up to 36 cabins may be installed, along with holosim chambers, hydroponics parks, dance halls and other entertainment areas. Freighters travel routinely among Earth, Luna, Mars, the Asteroid Belt, and Jupiter, carrying raw materials, finished goods or the vacationing rich.

• **L-B Venture B-9 IFT (Intrasystem Freight Transport):** The workhorse of the spacelanes, L-B's Venture-class freighter comes in a number of makes and models. The B-9 is the latest update, a 900-meter behemoth incorporating advances in grav-crystal grid matrices and hyper-fusion reactors.

VT: Freighter
Tech: Ω
VS: 3
Handling: 0
Mass: 200,000
Cost: ••••• ••••• (vehicle), •••• (passenger ticket)
Armor: 4 [10]
Weapons: Two turret-mounted, heavy laser cannons (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 8d10 [5] L); one missile bay with six smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L)

• **Orgotek Leviathan Jump Ship:** This 1,200-meter-long craft is a masterpiece of biotech innovation. The Leviathan integrates hardtech propulsion systems, biotech life-support and operations gear, and comes equipped with four fighter bays large enough to hold three hybrid craft each. Additionally, it has exterior docking for up to four frigates and 12 hybrids.

However, the Leviathan's crowning achievement is its extensive bioware components that enable it to be teleported psionically through vast reaches of space. These bio-organic computer systems, called Tessers, combine heavily modified matrix biocomputers with

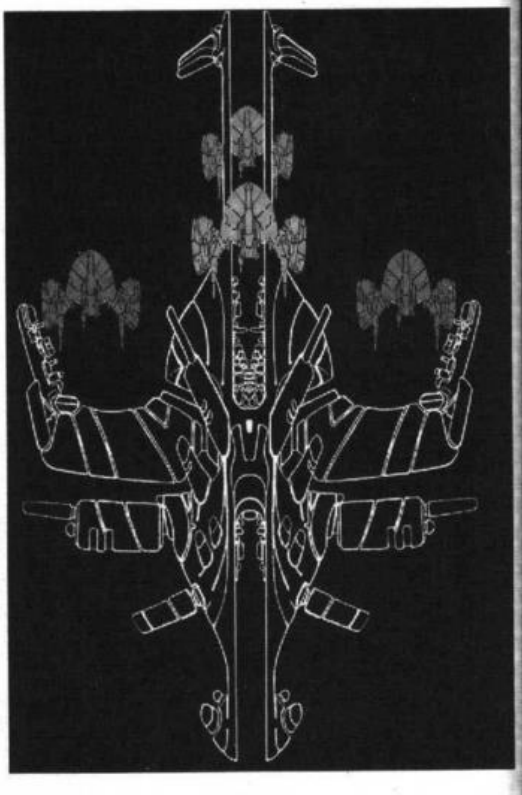


Upeo augmentation devices and Qin biotechnology. Tessers are a tantalizing mystery even to the scientists who designed them; the advanced biocomps seem to be the closest thing to true artificial intelligence ever created by humanity or Qin.

The Tesser itself takes up almost 70% of the Leviathan's mass, but every element is vital to calculate the ship's wavefunction, making the entire mass/energy exchange involved with a teleportational jump possible.

The exact number of Leviathans in service is strictly confidential, although various sources agree that less than 20 are in service currently. The Æon Trinity is coordinating efforts to launch exploration missions to the lost extrasolar colonies, while tests continue on the remaining jump ships.

VT: Freighter
Tech: Ψ
VS: 3
Handling: 0
Mass: 320,000
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 5 [10]
Weapons: Four turret-mounted, heavy laser cannons (Accuracy: +2, Damage: 8d10 [5] L); two missile bays with 20 smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L)



Performing a Jump

A teleportational jump requires extensive astrolocation from the clairsentient jump pilot (while others can steer the freighter in vacuum, only a clairsentient can trigger an actual jump). The seer casts out his perceptions, usually with the support of an ARES system, to the location he wants the ship to be in. The Tesser then links through this same bioapp. The psionic intermingling between Tesser and clairsentient — difficult to accomplish and draining to maintain — enables the Tesser to perceive the intended location.

With the information about the intended location in memory, the Tesser recalculates the ship's wavefunction, changing only one aspect: the location. The clairsentient then triggers the jump ship's transmission from one physical place to another through access to and manipulation of subquantum energy. Noeticists are still hard at work exploring the full variables involved in this process.

Some passengers claim the transit lasts only an instant, while others describe it as a lifetime. Tests show that jumps aren't actually instantaneous; a ship remains in subquantum flux for a period of time between a day and a week. The period of travel time apparently has little bearing on the distance traveled. Noeticists haven't determined what factors do dictate transit time.

Jumps cause strong disturbances in psi energy. A jump ship is therefore equipped with extensive bioshielding systems to absorb the massive subquantum flux, reducing the psionic backlash that Gifted feel when jumping (rolls made for psions on board a jump ship are based on half their Psi scores, rounded up, for any violent flux effects that occur outside the craft). Jumps are also performed and arrive well away from the nearest settled regions of space, to reduce the psionic impact that those outside a ship would feel.

Unfortunately, shielding doesn't protect a ship's passengers completely. Every jump-ship passenger, whether psion or neutral, is disoriented after transit. In game terms, roll Psi; each success is a minute, minimum of one, during which your character is overcome by the jump. Your character performs all actions at a base +2 difficulty while disoriented.

Additionally, some ship systems on Leviathans and even on piggybacked craft have been known to short out after a jump. While further testing should eliminate most of these problems, the need to return to the lost colonies overrides concerns over a few system glitches.

A Leviathan requires a week to recharge both biotech and hardtech systems sufficiently before it can jump again. It can carry out normal space maneuvers, but psi jumps require massive amounts of energy to perform.

By now you should be familiar with the **Æon** universe. As a Storyteller, you construct the framework of a story within a fictional setting and let the players build onto that framework by assuming the roles of the story's leading characters. You create the supporting cast, playing both the allies and antagonists with whom the characters interact. You also establish the setting details, inventing the ships, planets and cities that the characters encounter. The players decide how their characters react to the situations in the game, but you decide if the characters actually succeed in their efforts and, if so, how well.

Ultimately, the Storyteller's role is to ensure that everyone enjoys themselves. That means telling a good story that involves every character, treating characters and players fairly, and listening to what happens in your world as well as creating it.

Understanding the **Æon** universe and creating a believable series based on it requires intensive work. However, just because it's work doesn't mean it's not fun. The following sections describe the methods you can use to tell a good story and to enjoy yourself at the same time.

The Storyteller

The Storyteller's role in the game is more complex and involved than that of any other participant. After all, the Storyteller creates an entire universe anew every session. He populates it with all manner of friends, enemies, strangers and passersby. He determines what alien secrets or political intrigues the characters encounters, and what discoveries they make. Most importantly, the Storyteller must communicate his vision of worlds and events to the players, while allowing them to modify his plans with their own plot twists and character histories. Unlike writing a novel or a screenplay, Storytelling **Æon** is an interactive exercise. The best Storytellers take full advantage of this creative environment to weave memorable experiences.

While this book provides a rich variety of plot ideas and resource materials for stories, the Storyteller designs the specific setting of his particular story. He decides the political climate, invents the residents and describes the local architecture. The Storyteller provides the players with all of the information they receive concerning the world around their characters. As the Storyteller, you are responsible for informing the players of every significant detail.

Be Prepared

While "winging it" can provide a lot of spontaneous energy, it seldom results in a cohesive story. It isn't necessary to chart out every possible action that the characters might take in a plot, and to account for every eventuality. However, you should be prepared to deal with the most likely events, the decisions that the players will *probably* make. A simple outline of your planned events, main supporting characters and eventual finalé goes a long way toward focusing your story. Sketch out where you want the story to begin, what plot hooks you'll use to draw the characters in, and how you want the story to potentially end. The players will no doubt come up with courses of action that will make your story careen wildly off course, but you can always draw them back to the main plot when you feel it's time, or you can improvise new plot events based on the characters' actions.

The Storyteller should likewise pay an appropriate amount of attention to major characters who interact with the team. Prepare details for each significant figure so that the players recognize these people from story to story. Statistics aren't always necessary, but you should be ready to fake them if a situation demands it.

Additionally, pre-made maps, drawings, letters and the like can bring a level of realism to your game. Instead of telling the players what a person wrote in a letter, type it up and hand it to them. Handwritten notes can be scribbled down easily in the person's "handwriting." Maps and sketches of important devices provide you and the players with a common reference point. All of these details add to the game experience as a whole.

Rules

The rules are your tools; they're not commands that you must follow. They provide a common basis for comparing various characters' capabilities, and allow for the sensible resolution of conflicts. Rules do not control the story, create plot elements or determine the reactions of characters. Whenever there's a discrepancy between the rules and your story, the story should prevail.

Every rule in **Æon** is disposable. If you feel that certain psionic powers imbalance the game, modify them or toss them out entirely. If you believe that combat is too restrictive, allow the characters greater versatility of maneuvers. The rules are created as they are for your ease of play. Change them if they prove to be inappropriate.

If you do modify the rules, be sure to inform the players, and keep the changes consistent. The players must know if their characters' capabilities are suddenly curtailed or improved, or if certain basic alterations have been made. Regardless of what changes you make, they need to be constant from story to story and charac-

ter to character. Your modifications should not be different between events, nor should they favor certain players over others.

Characters

No movie worth its weight in celluloid could ever be complete without careful consideration of its main characters. Like the important characters in a movie, the players' characters are the stars of your game. If their characters don't suit the story you create, the chances of telling a good story are slim. While your stories don't need to be tailored specifically to the characters, the players should enjoy their adventures. You should discuss stories' objectives with them when they create their characters (but don't give away significant plot details). This assists players in making characters who can not only participate in your stories, but who add depth and enjoyment to them.

Interaction between the Storyteller and the players during the character generation process is crucial to a good story. While this exchange may be as simple as co-creating the setting, it can be vastly more complex. You, as the director of the **Æon** series, are responsible for fleshing out the connections among the players' characters and among the other important people in your fictional universe. The players' characters should have authentic lives, beyond the Backgrounds the players choose. Characters should have careers, histories and homes. These elements, supplied by the players and approved by you, bring depth and realism to the characters and to your stories. Realistic characters also create emotional links between the players and the universe you collectively create.

Background Characters

It's part of your job as Storyteller to fill the universe with interesting personalities. However, the players will also introduce people of their own creation through their characters' Backgrounds. Whether a player introduces a Mentor from a science station or several Contacts within the Æon Trinity, you must incorporate these people into your setting. A player's well-thought-out Background characters have names, occupations, descriptions and motivations.

Although the Storyteller has the option to refuse supporting characters, it may not be in your best interests to do so. These figures add extra dimensions to your setting, allowing for plot developments that you haven't considered. Furthermore, a supporting character introduced by a player is more tangible in that player's mind than are the people you create. If the Background figure presents too much of a problem, have the player modify her appropriately, but endeavor to make her a part of your series nonetheless.

Unfortunately, some players don't name their Background characters, let alone create significant details about them. That's the player's loss, because you then get to decide a person's importance to the story, and his ability to influence it. The Ally or Follower is almost like a double agent (although perhaps not quite so sinister) — he is both a resource for the player and a plot hook controlled by the Storyteller.

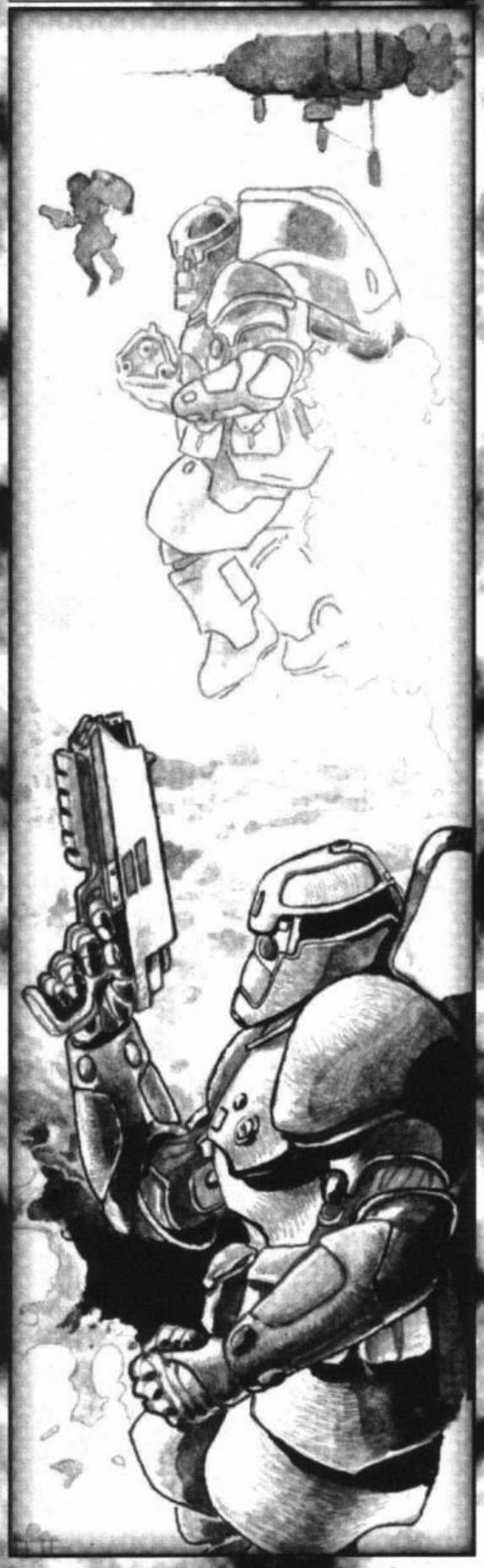
Here are some tips on handling supporting characters, either as creations of the players or as tools of your own.

- **Ally:** Allies should be created almost entirely by the players. These are the characters' most trusted friends and family, and strong bonds have been formed with them. Of course, you should approve Allies' finished details and statistics.
- **Contact:** A Contact is very useful as a Storyteller hook. She can provide information at dramatically appropriate moments, or can set up meetings with important third parties. Be prepared to give a Contact a larger role in your stories if she interacts particularly well with the players' characters. Also bear in mind that a character with a Contact Background is also a contact himself.
- **Follower:** Since a Follower is effectively a player's secondary character, his creation is up to the player. As always, you have final approval of the person. When looking over the Follower, make sure that his personality and goals are distinct from those of the player's character. A Follower created purely to provide the player with more time in the spotlight, or as a means to abuse the rules, should be vetoed. Otherwise, make an effort to incorporate the Follower into your series just as you would any other character.
- **Mentor:** Although a player may have other ideas, a character's Mentor has more on his mind than coddling a neophyte psion. The Mentor is more worldly than is the character. He therefore has more to deal with than just the player's character. An ambivalent relationship can result if the Mentor considers his understudy little more than an obligation (and perhaps even keeps the reasons for such treatment from the character). The teacher-student relationship can also be close-knit, as the Mentor makes an obvious effort to spend time with the character. A Mentor's specific rationale is ultimately up to you.

Storyteller Characters

While players invent their characters and perhaps a few Background figures, it's your responsibility to create the rest of the universe. This isn't to say that every neut on the street must have pre-prepared statistics and fully developed Backgrounds. However, you should create significant personalities with as much care and detail as the players use to create their characters.

You're well on your way to telling a great series when you've developed a supporting cast in the hundreds. Supporting characters aren't only a source of assistance for the players' characters, they're a source of plot hooks. Repaying a debt to an old friend is an



easy way to get psions involved in a story that can take them anywhere in known space or beyond. Supporting characters used as plot devices don't have to have been purchased by players as Backgrounds. Just because a player didn't list an Ally on his character sheet doesn't mean his character doesn't have a friend out there whom you can use as the catalyst for a story.

To create a believable series, make sure that time passes for the supporting cast as well as for the players' characters. If an Outback town's crops were destroyed in an Aberrant strike that the team repelled a month ago, make sure that events follow in keeping with that event. Maybe the colonists abandon their home for fear of starvation, or they blame the characters for their loss. The characters will encounter people from that Outback village again some day; the people shouldn't still be at their home, staring at their destroyed crops as the characters left them.

Here is a variety of important Storyteller characters that you should introduce to your game. You can use one of each, or several of each. There's no reason why your series can't have two or even three major villains. Why make things easy for the characters?

• **Major Villains:** A chief antagonist should be as complicated as the players' characters are, if not more so. The characters must bear witness to the evils and machinations of the villain before being given the opportunity to confront her. Never let them get their hands on a major foe in their first try. She must thwart them on multiple occasions to be truly hated and worthy of the team's attention. A major villain should seem to outmatch the characters at every turn until the heroes discover a weakness in her. Such an antagonist should inspire anger, frustration, fear, loathing and even grudging respect from the characters (and players) as they match wits.

Your major villains should be complex enough to last through several stories, and with sufficient resources to defeat the characters in a direct conflict. After all, the characters' struggles lose their drama if the big bad guy throws in the towel at the first sign of conflict, or is beaten handily. Major villains should be detailed fully, down to facial expressions, speech patterns and even hobbies.

Foes don't even have to be single individuals who confront the characters physically. They can be huge organizations that operate behind the scenes and that execute global plans, or they can be secret cabals of miscreants who pull political strings to thwart the characters and their orders. Important enemies come in every shape and size.

• **Minor Villains:** Minor villains are ideal for harassing the players' characters. These people usually follow a major villain's orders, disrupting or redirecting the heroes' efforts to get at the mastermind. Minor villains should be well-developed, complete with vital statistics, brief histories, descriptions and personality quirks. Minor villains usually rival the main characters'

capabilities, and pop up again and again until the characters dispense with them.

Minor villains can even be completely unrelated to the main plot of a story. One could be a jealous coworker, an ex-girlfriend or a random criminal who distracts the heroes from the real threat that they face. A minor villain doesn't have to wield taint-spawned powers to interfere in psions' duties.

• **Major Supporting Characters:** These personalities appear repeatedly throughout your series, providing the characters with clues, gear or just a sense of familiarity. Such people might travel with the characters in pursuit of the same goal, or might distract the characters with mundane annoyances. Major supporting characters should have appropriate details and statistics, at least sufficient to fulfill their functions in the series, but certainly not powerful enough to lay waste to the team — unless threat of that very thing is the essence of the person's role. A character's boyfriend might need a well-developed history, but few if any statistics. Meanwhile, a Trinity member might need Physical stats and a description, and nothing more.

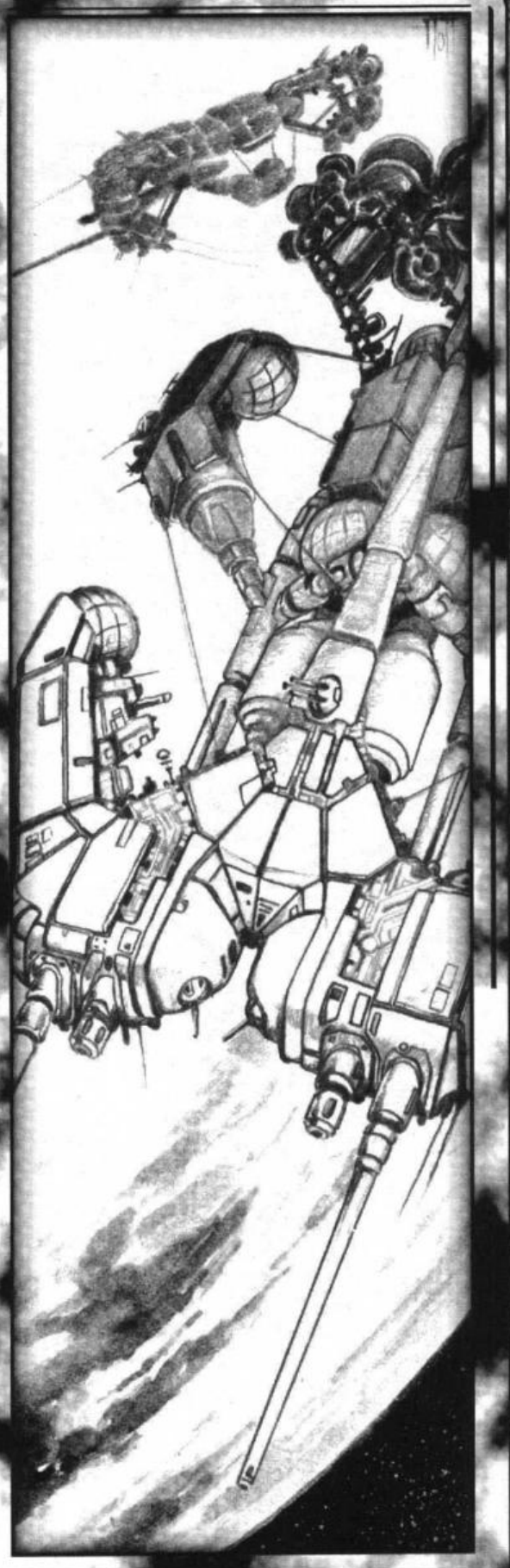
• **Extras:** Extras fall into two categories: minor supporting characters and thugs. Extras typically have identical statistics for easy bookkeeping, and usually have only four Health Levels. Such people help keep your stories rolling, giving out clues and steering misguided characters in the right direction. Reoccurring extras can often "make a name for themselves" within your series and develop into major allies or enemies.

Minor supporting characters are typically created on the spot as they become necessary, filling roles that emerge between the players' characters and significant Storyteller characters. Indeed, sometimes minor figures don't even need statistics, only names. Secretaries, street vendors, magtrain drivers, clerks, civil servants, pilots and dozens of other normal folks interact with the characters on a daily basis, and they're all minor personalities. Playing the parts of these people helps you to make your stories realistic with almost no preparation.

Thugs are very minor villains who are involved in small plot complications or in random events. Whether they're crooks involved in a spaceport brawl, or guards who need to be taken out in a tactical strike on a secret installation, these simple figures are necessary to make events realistic or to color the background of large scenes. A thug needs only as much description as the players request. Simple signatures, such as a certain color clothing, an ornamental pin or a scar can distinguish nameless thugs for the players' benefit.

Drama and Conflict

Drama and conflict make your stories and series come alive. It's best to start small and to build to a climax when planning events. Always think of where your story is going, and decide what steps need to be taken



to get it there. It's often easiest to envision a dramatic event that is the high point of your story, and then create the events that lead up to it.

Say you plan to stage a dramatic scene in which the team is chased from an exploding Orgotek research facility by FSM soldiers. That single scene generates many plot elements. Why are the characters being chased? Was someone they knew trapped inside? Why was the facility destroyed and who did it? Start to answer these questions and you're on the road to creating a story that ends with an incredibly dramatic moment.

Creating Mood

Aside from telling the players everything about the universe in which their characters exist, you must also establish a story's emotional undertones. While creating an entire reality involves tremendous work, establishing a story's mood can be just as difficult. Describing a derelict structure in the Pit is one thing. Making the players sense the area's decay is another.

Subtlety is the key to establishing mood. Continuing with the example of the Pit, if you want to convey the sector's dreariness, describe the stale tang of recycled air, the intermittent buzzing of old fluorescent lights, the refuse and exposed cables lining the corridors, the sporadic gravity fluctuations from worn out grav-crystal grids. Detail such features every few minutes throughout the characters' time spent there. None of the factors of this atmosphere relate directly to the story itself — your antagonist's plan probably doesn't involve poor air circulation systems in old Lunar sectors — but visualizing the glaringly poor conditions instills a sense of depression in the players. Words and images are your allies in storytelling.

The mood or tone that you want to create with a story or even your series largely determines the setting of events. In other words, your choice of location for encounters should evolve naturally from the tone you want to evoke in your game. The bowels of a vast arcology are an appropriate setting for dark, brooding scenarios. Gleaming orbital stations are a fitting home to social and political intrigue. There needs to be plenty of wide-open spaces and obstacles for the chases and high-adrenaline firefights that occur in action-packed stories. Matching a story's location to its mood creates a powerful roleplaying experience.

Cyberpunk versus *Star Wars*

Æon is fundamentally a game about hope. That doesn't mean it's all sweetness and light. As Storyteller, you must decide on the type of game that you want to play, and must provide the type of game that the players want to participate in. The types of stories that you tell set the mood of your universe. However, so does your conscious choice of how you treat the players, as does the way you enforce the rules. Remember, as the Storyteller, your word is law, even if you choose to break the rules.

- **Go for the Light:** If you decide to go with a high-adventure game, it's best to play fast and loose with the rules. This creates a heroic atmosphere. Epic adventures lend themselves to characters accomplishing feats of derring-do that someone could never achieve in real life. Jumping wide chasms, falling from great heights and knocking people out with a single blow all suit this style of play. If a player's character gets the drop on a guard, don't make the player roll to hit; just declare the guard knocked out. These gestures add flavor to a game that obedience of the rules cannot provide.
- **Embrace the Dark:** If you go for a dark game, stick to the rules. Make the characters work for everything. There won't be any easy knockouts or lucky shots here, not unless the dice bear them out. Nothing is as it seems, and the team can only truly rely on itself. Focusing on character and mood over action is important in these types of stories. Dark games tend have depth and focus, exacting a high price on both Storyteller and players. Players are usually relieved by successfully resolving a dark, dramatic series.

Conflict of Interest

Conflict is the crux of every story. It's the source of tension and drama in any tale. Without conflict, stories are lifeless and boring. A hero's struggle against overwhelming odds creates sympathy for the protagonist. This is even more true when a player controls the character — the character's victories become the player's victories.

The following are some basic conflicts that you can introduce to your **Æon** series.

Psion versus Psion: Despite their relatively common origins, psions are often on opposite sides of a cause. "Right" and "wrong" are subject to interpretation, depending largely on an individual's personal beliefs.

Psion versus Order: An order endowed the psion with his special powers, but should it control his life? What is the psion's obligation to his order, and what can he expect in return? The answer is sure to differ depending on who is asked.

Psion versus the Æon Trinity: Recognized as a force for change, the Trinity provides cohesion and direction for the disparate psi orders. The group promotes unity between all living things, and between psions, the agents of its grand scheme. What does service to the Trinity truly entail, and can it make the characters defy their own ethics?

Psion versus Aberrant: The seemingly unearthly Aberrants bring terror to humanity's heart. Only the psions stand between these horrific mutations and mankind. What do the Aberrants hope to achieve by attacking Earth and its colonies? Have they truly become as alien as they look?

Psion versus Alien: Humanity has only begun to explore the universe. The Qin seem to be our allies, but how much do we really know about them? The Chromatics are separated from us by vast reaches of space;

what have they been up to? The Coalition remains an enigma, their motives as alien as their physical forms.

Psion versus Government: Although the orders' influence continues to grow, the multitude of government factions throughout known space still controls humanity. An individual psion cannot always rely on his order's protection against a governmental body's awesome power.

Psion versus Corporation: The metacorps wield more power than many governments do. Even the Æon Trinity treads softly around the corporate monoliths. What hope does a psion have if he runs afoul of a metacorp?

Psion versus Technology: Developments in hardtech, bioware and even nanotech arise at an ever-increasing pace. Humanity relies on technology for virtually every need and convenience. Are we making ourselves obsolete?

Psion versus Humanity: Although born of humanity, psions have evolved beyond it. Where do they fit in normal society? Some say they are humanity's protectors, the future of mankind. Others call them a threat, the next Aberrants.

Psion versus Unknown: Humanity already deals with powers beyond its understanding. The number of things that we don't know far exceeds that which we *think* we know. What else lurks among the stars, hidden from our perceptions and comprehension?

Order versus Order: Much like each psion, each order has its own convictions about what's right. These perceptions interfere with attempts at inter-order cooperation. The orders inevitably come to cross-purposes as each tries to promote its own agenda. Which is right in the end?

Government versus Government: Territorial disputes, petty vendettas and ancient rivalries still plague Earth's governments. Psions are often caught up in (or are even the cause of) these bloody feuds.

Corporation versus Corporation: Much like governments, corporations spend a great deal of time and resources maneuvering against one another, be it economically, legally or privately. Psions often become key factors in many of these altercations.

Æon Trinity versus Other: Though Æon claims to be dedicated to humanity's cause, its agenda differs from that of many corporations, governments and even psi orders. What steps is the Trinity willing to take to promote its vision with these groups?

Order versus Other: Each order dedicates itself to defending humanity from Aberrants. Yet this has become just one of the endeavors that each order applies itself to. The organizations butt heads regularly with corporations and governments. How do such peripheral interests affect the psions' ability to defend humanity?

Government versus Other: Governments of various types have led humanity's march throughout history. Aside from the political and economic struggles that they've always been involved in, governments must now cope with powerful corporations, the psi orders and the Æon Trinity. What steps are governments willing to take to persevere against these rivals?

Corporation versus Other: Corporations are significant powers in the 22nd century, dictating policy to many governments and contesting even the psions' rights. Who can say what might result from strained relations between metacorps, between businesses and governments and even between conglomerates and the Trinity itself?

Gimmicks

Creating mood and drama isn't restricted to your story. Events in the story unfold in your players' minds, but the players belong to the real world. That means you can use the real world to help suspend their disbelief and to make the story more compelling.

Lighting is important. Dim the lights where you play or make them bright, whichever is appropriate to the setting that the characters are in. Use colored light bulbs. Keep that red bulb handy for when a ship's emergency lights come on, and watch as the players respond to their "characters'" environment. Mood music and ambient sound effects (rain, wind, alarms, engines) draw players further into the story. When a character is isolated from the rest of the team, have the other players leave the room. Use walkie-talkies to convey how frustrating communicating by radio can be.

Creating drama doesn't even have to be restricted to the gaming event. Keep players immersed in the story between sessions so their sense of involvement is maintained or even intensified for when they return to the table. Talk about game ideas between sessions, ask players about the plans they have for their characters, or about their predictions of what will happen next in the story. Such "downtime contributions" keep the story alive and help you tailor the game to what the players want.

You could even send "in-character" messages, such as official documents or requests for aid from friends, via email to players. Such "handouts" whet players' appetites, making them all the more eager to come to the next game session. Just be sure that the emails you send are clearly meant to be in-game. A threat meant for a player's character might not be taken well if it's misunderstood by the player.

Theme

Hope, Sacrifice, Unity. Powerful words. They are the foundation of the **Æon** universe because they reflect the three ages of the Æon Trinity, the cornerstone of human civilization in the 22nd century. Keep these themes in mind when creating your stories. Unity is particularly important in **Æon**; it's the goal that the Trinity seeks to accomplish to ensure the survival of humanity against the Aberrant menace. However, individual adventures don't have to be about these themes exclusively. Whatever theme you explore — hope, sacrifice, unity, intrigue, revenge, honor, isolation, or even horror — stick to it to elevate your story beyond being "just a game."

The best books, movies and television programs have the power to motivate and move you, and that power raises them above being simple entertainment. Stories, whether in print or on a screen, can be thought-provoking, even life-altering. Your games can be that and more. Not every session you play will be memorable, but some will create lasting memories; group experiences that all of the players will remember for years to come. A solid underlying theme is the foundation on which to build such games.

Selecting a theme for a story or even a series can be difficult, but it's worthwhile because that theme becomes the driving force behind most events. Indeed, the theme of a story can determine the outcome of important conflicts and dramatic moments. Does a messenger die from her effort to get information to the team? If a story's theme is sacrifice, then the answer is probably yes. If the theme is hope, she may live. Establishing and staying true to your theme determines the course of events in your story, and the consistent resolution of those events sets the tone of your story.

Setting

A game that involves space travel and multiple worlds can have a diluted setting. The scope of such a game is huge, and the characters can easily be lost in the shuffle. A well-defined setting, in which the characters feature prominently, is one of your best tools for creating and maintaining continuity, whether in a story or in a series. Your games can be set in the Underworld of Luna, in all of its dives, squalid tunnels and shelters; they can be set on the fringe of known space, in a solar system where Chromatics were recently encountered; or your games can be set aboard a frigate that the characters know from top to bottom, but in a region of space that they have no clue about. The characters should be introduced to and allowed to become familiar with the locales and supporting cast of this major setting before they move on to explore new regions. If the characters change locale constantly, the players must scramble to understand each new setting, and may never get a chance to know their own characters. Such a lack of stability is distracting, and undermines your stories' narratives.

Determine where the characters live and set most of their stories in that place. The psions' "home base" should be a constant. Depth of storytelling derives from characters' (and players') intimate familiarity with what's around them. Knowing and having relationships with supporting characters is as valid a source for stories as is running afoul of total strangers and stumbling into the unknown. A character has to know the local politician before she can blackmail him, and clashing with someone the character knows is much more compelling than clashing with yet another faceless opponent.

However, this is not to say that the team shouldn't travel and see new places. A change of venue, even for extended periods of time, can create enjoyable new

roleplaying opportunities. Yet you should put serious thought into new environments before ushering the characters into them. New realms should be just as realistic and compelling as home, or should at least seem so. And if you have created a rich, detailed home for the characters, you may be surprised when the players are relieved to send their psions back there.

Locale

Establishing a setting for your stories goes beyond saying "they take place in deep space." You need to decide the specific locales that the characters frequent. The two primary choices are Earth and space. Æon is set in the future, and in a science-fiction one at that. There's a lot that new players don't know about the game universe, and they need to become familiar with the setting in order to understand their characters. It's therefore advised that you start your series on Earth, or near it, perhaps on the Moon. Even though Earth has undergone a lot of changes by the 22nd century, it's still more familiar to a 20th-century player than is the *Mafaa-3* space station.

Start with what you know. Explore the Earth, its landscape, its people. Introduce the players to the changes that have occurred over the last 120 years, and at a pace that everyone is comfortable with. Introduce elements of the future — psionic powers, alien races, space travel, interstellar politics — a few at a time. Once the players have a sense for how the world has changed, you can teleport their characters into deep space aboard living space ships, so that the psions can battle unimaginable alien beings and mutated humans bent on destroying their homeworld. Get the idea?

Game Concepts

The game concepts provided below are just a small sampling of ideas and themes that can be used in **Æon** stories. They're intended to give you a sense of the variety and scope that **Æon** can achieve. A concept might spark a complete story idea, might initiate a series of subplots, or might serve as a springboard for an entire series.

• **Aberrant Assault:** A routine psion patrol of the Asteroid Belt turns deadly when the team stumbles across a mining station that's been overrun by Aberrants.

Rather than kill the hostages outright, as the psions might expect the Aberrants to do, the monstrosities hold the miners hostage. What are the reasons behind this change of tactics? Did the mining station uncover something important? Are these Aberrants even affiliated with the others that continue to raid human outposts and colonies? Are the miners and Aberrants working together? How will the team resolve the situation?

Possible themes: Suspense, intrigue, horror (outmatched psions, humans against the horrific)

• **Alienation:** A Qin delegate is assassinated in Neo Paris. The team is called in to investigate while the alien race contemplates retaliation. As the characters delve further into what happened, they discover that extreme factions among the Qin themselves are involved.

Does the team have to travel to the Qin homeworld in an attempt to learn more about the factious race? Is one of the alien passengers part of the plot? The Qin normally keep to themselves; what steps must the characters take to win the aliens' trust? If the Qin retaliate, how can the characters respond without escalating the conflict? Why was the delegate killed in the first place? Does the team have the right to interfere in what might be a Qin power struggle?

Possible themes: Things are not as they seem, political intrigue, what does "alien" really mean?

• **Corporate Shuffle:** The characters sign on with Orgotek and become embroiled in metacorp warfare.

While Orgotek has humanity's best interests at heart, it also has its eye on the bottom line. What pies does Orgotek's have its fingers in, beyond what Joe Hologram is aware of? How far does the company's reach extend? How do corporations handle trade, espionage and public relations differently than do governments? Does Orgotek's influence over the team help or hinder the characters' actions? What is the metacorp really up to?

Possible themes: Corporate intrigue, company line versus personal ethics, the metacorps' influence on world affairs

• **Dark Matters:** The team is sent in a jump ship to investigate one of the lost extrasolar colonies. They discover the colonists, safe and well, but the humans refuse aid and insist that their would-be rescuers leave. The jump systems take longer than expected to restore power, leaving the team stranded and forced to deal with increasingly hostile colonists.

Are the colonists simply xenophobic, or are they hiding something? Are they held in thrall by Aberrants, and do they want the characters to leave before the creatures return? Have rogue quantakinetics, who escaped Earth's purge years ago, taken up residence on the colony and assumed control? Has an unknown organism caused a mental imbalance among the colonists? Have they discovered another race or some previously unknown resource and fear that Earthers will jump their claim?

Possible themes: Paranoia, deciding who the real enemy is, culture clash

• **Earth Siege:** Aberrant attacks in near space and on Earth increase. Clairsentient scans uncover what seems to be an Aberrant base hidden in our very solar system.

Although the scenario seems straightforward, a number of questions present themselves. Are saboteurs attempting to undo the psions' strike on the Aberrant base? If so, are they Aberrants or Aberrant sympathizers? Once the attack is launched, what can the psions expect to find? Are the Aberrants ready for them, or do they flee? Do some escape, heading for who knows where? Is the base itself a decoy, a diversion while Aberrants attack key Earth targets?

Possible themes: Retribution against invaders, race against time, discovering the true enemy

• **Founding Fathers:** Homesteaders in North America's ravaged Outback lands are subjected to FSM crackdowns. The citizens seek to secede from the Federated States of America. Orgotek seems to be supplying the "rebels" with supplies and materials, while the Æon Trinity takes an officially neutral stand.

Do the characters try to sway the Trinity into helping the citizens, or do they join the battle independently? What side are the characters loyal to?

Possible themes: Personal ideals versus established policy, rebellion, might makes right

• **Infiltrate the FSM:** The Æon Trinity sends the team on a long-term mission to infiltrate of the Federated States Military. The FSM sends the characters on missions, such as efforts to put down Mexican freedom fighters, creating intrigue and moral dilemmas. Do the characters' loyalties lie with the Trinity, the FSM or with the Mexicans? Can the psions carry out their appointed duties with the FSM, even if they're designed to undermine the Trinity itself?

Perhaps the FSM isn't as corrupt or dominating as it seems (unlikely, but possible). The characters may uncover black-market trading operations; are such endeavors in the Trinity's best interests? Are the teammates exposed as spies? How can the characters flee the awesome might of the North American military-corporate complex?

Possible themes: Evaluating your personal ideals, friendship versus obedience to the Æon Trinity

• **Rogue Psions:** A group of psions strikes out on its own, using its powers purely for personal gain. Aside from its flagrant disregard for the law, the group is causing serious damage to the orders' reputation. Your team is sent to bring the rogues in.

Is the team supposed to keep a low profile while pursuing the rebels? How does the media help (or hinder) the characters' effort? What level of force is the team authorized to use in apprehending the psions? Are any of the characters personally involved with any of the renegades? Does the team face a moral dilemma with this mission?

Possible themes: Power and responsibility, loyalty to others versus loyalty to a cause, truth versus perception

• **Space Station Crash:** The team is called in to retrieve secret documents from within the downed *Esperanza*. Why wait so long to get these documents? What forces are at work to stop the team from succeeding?

Once they get to the ravaged France, the characters must deal with the sad souls who live in the desolation left by the crash. Are they willing to let interlopers dig through the wreckage? The evidence that the characters uncover seems to indicate that the *Esperanza*'s crash didn't go as history claims. What did Orgotek really know in advance of the attack? Is the information limited to the order, or are all of them involved? How does the Æon Trinity factor in? How closely was the disaster tied to the Upeo disappearance?

Of course, it's also possible that Aberrants might be hiding out in the irradiated wasteland. How did they get there undetected? Is the team strong enough to deal with the Aberrants? Is direct confrontation the best way to deal with the invaders?

Possible themes: Discovering the truth, Machiavellian intrigue

• **Strangers in a Strange Land:** Your characters are sent to Nippon to investigate indications of Aberrant incursion.

The Nihonjin are unusual in their development of hard technology to extremes. How does the team cope with this strikingly different culture? Ways of dealing with individuals and officials are unique here; will the characters work within the system or try to forge ahead on their own? How do the teammates deal with Nippon's laws against weaponry, and restrictions on biotechnology? What influence does the Æon Trinity or do the psi orders have in Nihonjin society, and how far can the psions push before Nippon pushes back?

Possible themes: Investigation and mystery, culture clash, paranoia, finding common ground

• **Trinity Dealings:** The characters are involved directly in Æon Trinity operations.

The Trinity is a part of, yet apart from, many of the movers and shakers of the 22nd century. What does this power and influence do to an organization? To an individual? What insight do the characters gain by working from behind the scenes on Æon's various assignments? Is the organization as altruistic as it presents itself to be? What does it expect from its members, and what can they expect in return? Does the Trinity truly have better insight into what's happening in the universe than do other groups? How do answers to all of these questions affect the characters' role in the cosmic scheme?

Possible themes: Power and responsibility, wheels within wheels, insight, what is truth?

Telling Stories

In a long-term series, the plotline that you start with is likely to change over time. This may result from the characters' actions or from a new direction that you introduce. Altering plotlines is good. Storytellers who can react to a changing situation are a rare breed.

Listen to the players after each game. Quiz them about their opinions on what happened and what they suspect will occur next. You can work those ideas into your original plot, or if you're being too predictable and the group knows what you're up to, you can change the course of things. Always keep the players eager to find out what comes next. Be flexible and prepared to help the players get what they want from the game. Chang-

ing plots and story directions to suit the desires and tastes of everyone makes for a better game overall.

One-Shot Games and Ongoing Series

"One-shot," or single-session games and long-running series both have their benefits. There are a number of situations in which stand-alone stories are appropriate, such as when a group of players may not meet regularly, or when the same people cannot attend every game. Single, self-enclosed game sessions are enjoyable to those who can attend, but don't require constant upkeep.

One-shot games can also be used to experiment with characters and to test new players, characters or even plotlines before integrating them into an ongoing series. Such tests help you to decide if new elements suit your larger game, and if they're worthwhile integrating or pursuing.

Yet, while running single-evening games can be entertaining, an ongoing series usually offers greater depth, drama and enjoyment. Television and film series like *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5* benefit from the long-term association of their characters and stories. The same feeling of continuity can be achieved in **Æon** by thinking of your games as an epic series of films brought to the screen of your collective imagination. All that's required to create an ongoing series is a little pre-planning and coordination between the players and the Storyteller.

Multiple Storytellers and Story Arcs

There is an alternative to running a series that works well for groups that lack a permanent Storyteller. The players (or those who want to) take turns running story arcs. The players use their traditional characters in the same old setting, but the character of that arc's Storyteller goes on hiatus temporarily (she's in training, visiting family, on vacation). Alternatively, the stand-in Storyteller's normal character is relegated to a supporting role for that arc.

Each temporary Storyteller prepares a miniseries that lasts two or three sessions (although longer arcs are certainly feasible). When that player's turn is completed, the next takes over and runs a new arc. You can even implement some rules specific to this style of play, just to liven things up. For example, the current Storyteller might foreshadow an event that the next Storyteller must resolve in her arc. The result is fun games within games, as each Storyteller sets the stage for the next and forces his successor to work with the hand she's dealt.

Running a Game Session

The beginning of a story and series is often the most difficult part to create and tell. It takes time for characters to be introduced to one another and to become living, breathing people. Each new game session presents similar problems, but on a smaller scale, as you need to bring the players up to speed on past or current events, and to recapture the mood established in the last session. Only then can you proceed with the current session and its story.

However, once you get the ball rolling, your game should move along nicely. There are a few things to remember as you go proceed, though. The players' characters are the story's heroes. While supporting characters and villains should get their fair share of "screen time," you don't want to turn the game into a showcase for your acting talent. Roleplaying is a group effort, and if you hog the spotlight, your players will lose interest.

Don't spend too much time on any one player. It's fine if a given scene is specific to that character, but make sure the other players can take part in events, if possible. If not, follow up a single-character scene with one that's about the other players' characters. It can be difficult to juggle separated characters and multiple players, but sometimes you have to, and players lose interest if they sit unattended for too long.

Ending a game session demands good timing. The session has to end some time, but the question is when. You don't want to end things when the characters are in the middle of a fight (unless an appropriate cliffhanger is involved), and you don't want to end a game when characters have nothing to do and no motivation to pursue in the next session. Always leave the players wanting more. Cliffhangers make superb endings. They leave the players dying to get back to the table to know what happens to their characters. Do they survive the explosion in the hardtech factory? Can they pull their ship out of a dive into an asteroid? How will they face the Aberrant horde that's just appeared? Don't be afraid to end a session a little early if the timing of events makes for a dramatic closing. Likewise, know when enough is enough. Don't push on if the players are losing interest or have other things to do. You'll just end up with an unsatisfying storytelling experience. Come back to it next week when everyone is ready to continue.

Perhaps the most difficult part of running a series is knowing when it needs to end. Let legendary characters retire into legendary status. The best Storytellers know when to end a series before it becomes stale and old. Don't let your series turn into one of those movie sequels that never seem to end and that lose integrity as a result. When you feel that you, your players, and the characters have told a story that can't be topped, don't try to. Take your memories of defeat-turned-victory, and move on. Don't let your game become *Rocky V*. Let it go while you can still claim it was one of the best stories ever told.

The Series

Just as a story has a beginning, middle and end, so does a series. A series makes sense and is an entity unto itself. Although individual stories might vary in subject matter and style, stories are simply the episodes that form the creature that is your series. Taking the broad view of a series helps you to understand the best way to begin and follow through on individual stories. And when your stories have been told, you can look back and see where the characters have gone, what they have done, and what they have become — and you can reflect on the epic scope that your combined stories have created.

Introduction

The Prologue (first described in **Chapter Two: Character**, page 171) introduces the players to your universe and even to their own characters. You get together with each player and use the Prologue to work out the details of the character's life before the moment when your series truly begins. Where did the character live? What was his job? How did he get along with his family?

Each player's Prologue also serves as a brief test of his character's personality. You and the player should run though a brief scene that establishes the character's manners and behavior. Doing so helps you understand how the character is likely to react under certain circumstances, and it helps the player get into his character.

Each character's Prologue should also involve or be inspiration for the first plot hooks of your series. Each brief scene should offer some clue of the events to come. Perhaps a character's friend contacts him, requesting help against forces working against her. Perhaps a character overhears a suspicious exchange between co-workers that hints at an unrevealed villain's machinations. These clues and hints will be the impetus for a starting character's first true actions and motives in the series proper.

The Opening

Once your players finalize their histories, detail their Backgrounds and explore their Prologues, you're ready to begin the series. Bringing the characters together is your toughest job. A traditional thread involves introducing an enemy or patron common to all of the characters. An enemy serves to unite the characters in their struggle. A benevolent patron brings the characters together and supports them in their efforts. Things are seldom what they seem, though. A villain could seem evil, but only because his values oppose those that the characters assume to be right or just. A seemingly benevolent patron could turn out to be a series' true villain, and the characters are his misguided pawns.

Another way to bring the heroes together involves simply having them all be in the same place at the same

Storytelling the Prometheus Effect

Psions who undergo the Prometheus Effect experience it differently. To some, it's like stepping into a lush, three-dimensional hologram complete with full, quadraphonic digital sound after having lived in an old, scratchy black-and-white film. Others describe it as sitting down to a feast of succulent fresh fruits and vegetables, tender meats and flavorful wines after eating dust and cobwebs for years. And others describe it like truly *feeling* your body after years of being a mere passenger within it.

While these descriptions apply to the process in general, latents triggered into the different Aptitudes have experiences unique to those Aptitudes. A biokinetic senses every cell of his physical form with absolute intimacy. A clairsentient has a grasp of the true magnitude of the space around her; a sense for the layers of reality that exist beyond her immediate presence. An electrokinetic perceives the fluctuating waves of energy that flow throughout everything. A psychokinetic perceives the patterns in which molecules ebb and flow around him. A telepath hears the mental whispering of those around her, and is flooded with people's thought-images. A vitakinetic senses life energy coursing through him and those near him.

Ultimately, words can't adequately describe the experiences of the Prometheus Effect. Unfortunately, the Storyteller must use words to relate the sensation to a player. You must evoke the magnitude of the change, painting a picture so vivid that the player feels that he is the one immersed in biogel, and that it's his form that taps into a greater awareness.

Use mood music, lighting and any other tools at your disposal to heighten the drama. If you make the transformation into a psion a memorable event, every reference made thereafter to psionic powers and to the Gifted will have that much greater meaning for the players.

time when something strange or unforeseen occurs. The characters can't help but cross each others' paths while investigating the event.

If the players would like their characters to be friends at the beginning of the series, these first encounters can be played out as flashbacks, or as elements of each character's Prologue. Players might hope that creating characters who are friends or relatives will bring them together more easily, and will help them stay together in situations that might otherwise divide them.

The Storyteller may even want to assist players in creating links between their characters, resulting in plot hooks that can be used later. "You remember that hospital where you met, and that psychotic rex who tried to kill you all? Rumor has it that he's on an orbital station...." You can increase the tension of current plotlines by drawing on the characters' back-stories, relating current story elements to events with which the players are already familiar.

Whatever method you use to bring the characters together, make their connections plausible. If the team isn't built on a strong foundation, your stories will be correspondingly weak.

The Body

Once the characters are brought together by a common cause, the Storyteller's responsibility shifts. Developing the story in your intended direction becomes the goal. This doesn't mean ramrodding the team through a series of scenarios and dictating their actions. Nor does it mean sitting back and letting the players run their characters around as they will.

The Storyteller guides the team, introducing plot elements at a pace that matches both the story's development and the characters' investigative skills. In the time between such introductions (each of which can range from the glaringly obvious to the supremely subtle), the characters interact with each other and with the characters you control. That roleplaying can take a story and the series in a slightly different direction than you originally intended. However, as long as everyone enjoys themselves and you can still guide events toward your intended resolution (or you can roll with the players' changes and come up with an entirely new plot direction), these tangents aren't a problem. In fact, some of the best gaming experiences occur when the plot takes an unforeseen, temporary sidetrack.

Once the series is underway, keeping the teammates together occurs automatically. The characters' search for clues, discussion of alternate plans and simple cooperation creates a sense of camaraderie. The Storyteller's judicious use of other people, including the team members' Allies, Contacts and Mentors, strengthens this bond even more, either as examples of what cooperation can accomplish, or as examples of how dissension can destroy hopes and efforts.

In the meantime, the villains' plans continue to unfold, despite the team's attempts to uncover the truth or to defeat the offenders. The importance of maintaining antagonists' "behind-the-scenes" actions cannot be understated. If the villains are out in the open from the beginning, there won't be much mystery in identifying them or challenge in defeating them.

Furthermore, allowing villains to progress unseen lends realism to the series; opponents accomplish things, just as the team does. Antagonists won't wait for characters to catch up on the nefarious plots that they've hatched. If the team follows a red herring, whether designed by you

or stumbled across during roleplaying, the stakes grow even greater. The characters can lose precious time and may allow their enemy to triumph. Such failure can discourage players, so unless they're determined to pursue tangents, or you can turn those asides into an even better story than the original, it's recommended that you guide errant players back to the main plot, whether in a story or a series.

A series should develop until a finalé is not only imminent but necessary. All of the plot hooks you cast, the information that's revealed and the clues that are uncovered should tie together and lead the characters into direct confrontation with the series' major villains.

The Finalé

The team has crushed the main antagonists' thugs and has defeated minor villains. Now comes the greatest threat. The finalé, as the culmination of your efforts, should tie up loose ends and answer any questions that linger about the series. It should conclude the ongoing story and should be dramatic for both you and the players.

If you're telling a single story within an epic series, that story's finalé asks as many new questions as it answers old ones, or provides new motivations as old ones are resolved. In defeating a powerful underworld figure, the characters discover that someone else was pulling his strings all along. An important ally's death while slaying an Aberrant strengthens the team's resolve to pursue their mission against the enemy. A single story's conclusion provides a springboard to the next stage of the epic.

A series' finalé is more dramatic than that of any one story in the series. The characters achieve a level of successes that exceeds all other accomplishments. They discover even the most deeply hidden truths and confront the most terrible of foes. The final conflict, whether in a courtroom or in deep space, releases the pent-up aggressions that the team has developed for its nemesis. The Storyteller should make sure that the players feel this tension. This is the final showdown, the time when these few souls can make all the difference in the universe.

The Denouement

This brief concluding chapter wraps up events after the finalé. The team takes time to lick its wounds, gather its wits, appreciate its successes and reflect on what it has done throughout the series. The denouement provides the players a respite from the action of the finalé, allowing them to revel in closing the series.

If this is simply the end of a story, not of a series, the characters gather strength after their adventure. This is a good time for them to discuss theories on what to do next.

Whether you're ending a story or a series, allow each player a satisfying concluding scene. Highlight each character's accomplishments and bring a sense of closure to the story.

Supporting Cast

Your series wouldn't be complete without a strong supporting cast. Some of these secondary characters, extras and antagonists will certainly be psions, but a wide variety of cultures, organizations and individuals exist in the **Æon** universe. This appendix provides a brief description of a few major groups and opponents that a psion team might run into. Don't limit yourself to the information provided here — or even elsewhere in the book — though. Fiction, movies, the world around you, and your imagination all provide a wealth of ideas and characters on which to draw.

Aberrants

Aberrants are powerful, mad creatures. Though they were once human, these beings have been corrupted by mutation. The Mazarin-Rashoud node gifts the victim of Aberrant Syndrome with incredible powers, but at the cost of his sanity and humanity.

Indeed, Aberrants are all the more horrific for having been human — what else might we become? Legends and nightmares made real, Aberrants seem to have existed since humanity's beginning, and may explain extraordinary individuals in human history. In the 22nd century, Aberrants are evil given form, but to what end? The origins of Aberrant Syndrome are as much a mystery as the Aberrants' motives are now.

Those Aberrants who have taken the time to shout proclamations claim that they're retaking the Earth as their rightful home. Yet not all Aberrants are interested in making such declarations; their actions seem to have no rhyme or reason. However, there is a growing trend toward organized assaults on human intrastellar outposts and even on Earth itself. The Aberrants could be directed by some agency, perhaps an immensely powerful individual of their own kind.

ABERRANT TEMPLATE

The following statistics are a simple guide for Aberrants. Psions do well to remember that no two Aberrants are ever exactly the same. The Storyteller is encouraged to use her imagination in creating Aberrant appearances and powers.

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 3+	Brawl 2+, Might 2+
Dexterity 2+	Athletics 1+, Firearms 1+, Melee 1+, Stealth 2+
Stamina 3+	Endurance 2+
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 2+	Awareness 1+
Intelligence 1+	Engineering 1+, Intrusion 1+, Survival 2+
Wits 1	
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 0	Intimidation 3+
Manipulation 1+	Command 1+, Subterfuge 1+
Charisma 1+	Savvy 1+

Powers: Vary wildly with the individual. See **Aberrant Powers**, below.
Backgrounds: Allies 1+, Cipher 3+, Resources 1+
Willpower: 6
Psi: 1
Gear: Most Aberrants rely solely on their powers. However, an enterprising Aberrant isn't above using a laser, armor or even a spacecraft if it suits its purposes (or if it simply never got the hang of simulating the effects of such devices). Aberrants cannot use formatted bioware.

Aberrant Powers

Each Aberrant has a couple of "signature powers" for which it has a particular knack. While these abilities are different in origin from psi powers (Aberrants manipulate weak and strong nuclear forces, not subquantum energy), many of these effects are similar to psionic powers. Powerful Aberrants (who are often leaders) have significantly more potent abilities than do their brethren. However, this increase in power is often matched by ever-more-severe mutations and insanity.

As the Storyteller, feel free to have an Aberrant use any listed psi power (including mixing Modes; Aberrants' "power frameworks" are entirely different from those of psions). You may also use some of the sample effects, below, to create new powers.

- **Acid:** Whether secreted through the Aberrant's skin, coursing through its blood or fired from its body in streams, acid causes from five to eight dice of Lethal damage to anything that comes in contact with it.
- **Armor:** A tough, resilient skin that gives the Aberrant a reptilian appearance. This armor has a rating of [2/5, 0].
- **Enhanced Characteristics:** Fueled by the taint, one or more of the Aberrant's Physical or Mental Attributes may be increased by as much as five dots (final ratings may exceed five).
- **Natural Weaponry:** Some sort of natural weapons, whether fangs, barbed tentacles or claws. Attacks with such weapons cause Lethal damage.
- **Regeneration:** The Aberrant possesses an incredible healing capacity, allowing it to recover two Bashing or one Lethal Health Level each turn.
- **Tentacles:** One of the most common Aberrant mutations. Whatever the number, size and location from which these additional limbs sprout, the Aberrant has full control of them.

• **Warp:** This formidable power enables the Aberrant to literally tear a hole in the dimensional fabric of the universe. By entering this opening, the Aberrant travels through an extradimensional plane and emerges at another point in our universe. Psions who get the chance to look into this alternate reality are unable to describe it adequately. Indeed, looking at it inflicts profound psychological trauma on most individuals. This spatial disruption is detected by physical sensors up to 1000 kilometers away in space (30 kilometers on a planet). Psionic sensing registers it at twice those distances.

A warp's size depends on an Aberrant's power (and how big a rift the being decides to create). It can be seen by anyone in the immediate vicinity, and remains in place for a few minutes before collapsing. While warps can apparently open to deposit an Aberrant anywhere, those emerging from one seem to be disoriented momentarily. The handful of humans who have entered a warp have never been seen again. This is an extremely rare power among Aberrants.

Æon Trinity

This independent organization is involved in almost every level of 22nd-century society. Most people on the street are vaguely familiar with the name, but most have no idea what the Æon Trinity is really about.

People from all walks of life, from slummers to corporate executives, government officers to psion leaders, are either members of or are associated with the Æon Trinity. The Trinity is a subtle yet powerful force for change. The templates below are for neutral humans. However, psions make up an increasingly large number of Æon's members.

• **Neptune Division:** This Æon Trinity division ensures that the organization runs smoothly. It maintains communications between the various divisions and teams, and it is the face that the public sees when dealing with the Trinity.

NEPTUNE DIVISION MEMBER TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 2	
Dexterity 2	Athletics 1, Firearms 2, Drive 1, Martial Arts 1
Stamina 2	Resistance 1
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 2	Awareness 3
Intelligence 2	Bureaucracy 3, Linguistics 1
Wits 2	Rapport 1
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 2	Intimidation 2, Style 1
Manipulation 3	Command 3, Subterfuge 3
Charisma 3	Etiquette 3, Savvy 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1+, Cipher 2, Citizenship 1+, Contacts 2+, Influence 2+, Resources 3
Willpower: 7
Psi: 1

• **Triton Division:** This arm of the Æon Trinity follows the dictum: Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. These investigators are masters of uncovering facts, from archeological digs to crime scenes. This group also includes important scientific minds.

TRITON DIVISION MEMBER TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 2	
Dexterity 2	Athletics 1, Drive 1, Martial Arts 1, Firearms 2
Stamina 2	Resistance 1
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 3	Awareness 2, Investigation 3
Intelligence 3	Academics 3+, Bureaucracy 1+, Intrusion 1, Medicine 1, Science 2+, Engineering 2+
Wits 2	Rapport 1
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 2	
Manipulation 2	Command 1, Subterfuge 3
Charisma 2	Etiquette 1, Savvy 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1+, Cipher 2, Citizenship 1+, Contacts 2+, Influence 2+, Resources 3
Willpower: 7
Psi: 1

• **Proteus Division:** The shadowy, third arm of the Æon Trinity, this division is the one that "gets things done." This may include liberating captured agents, assisting a nation in covert operations or dealing with a potential threat to the Trinity. Proteus agents also guard sensitive materials and information acquired by the Neptune or Triton divisions.

PROTEUS DIVISION MEMBER TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 2	Might 1
Dexterity 3	Athletics 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Martial Arts 3, Melee 1, Stealth 2
Stamina 2	Resistance 3
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 3	Awareness 3, Investigation 1
Intelligence 2	Bureaucracy 1, Intrusion 2, Linguistics 1, Survival 1
Wits 3	Rapport 1
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 2	Intimidation 2
Manipulation 3	Command 2, Interrogation 2, Subterfuge 3
Charisma 2	Etiquette 1, Savvy 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1+, Cipher 2, Citizenship 1+, Contacts 2+, Influence 2+, Resources 3
Willpower: 7
Psi: 1

Qin

The Qin (pronounced "chihn" or "chehn") are not humanoid. The bodies they wear were constructed to ease interaction with humans. These "biosuits" are simply one example of the Qins' advanced biotechnology. An actual Qin apparently looks similar to a meter-long slug with a row of prehensile tentacles just above the underside of its body. However, no one has ever seen a Qin outside its environment suit. The only thing we really have to go by are the too-perfect biosuits that humans see every day.

QIN DIPLOMAT TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 1	
Dexterity 2	Athletics 1, Drive 1
Stamina 2	Endurance 1
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 3	Awareness 3, Investigation 2
Intelligence 4	Academics 2, Bureaucracy 3, Engineering 3, Linguistics 1, Medicine 1, Science 1
Wits 3	Meditation 1, Rapport 2
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 3	Intimidation 1, Style 2
Manipulation 3	Command 2, Subterfuge 3
Charisma 3	Etiquette 3, Perform 1

Aptitude: (Telepathy) Empathy 1+
Backgrounds: Cipher 3, Contacts 1+, Devices (biosuit) 4, Followers (Qin Warriors) 3+, Influence 3, Resources 4
Willpower: 6
Psi: 4
Gear: Biosuit. The Qin also have their own biotech matrices with which they can create almost anything they need.

QIN WARRIOR TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 4	Brawl 3, Might 3
Dexterity 4	Athletics 3, Firearms 2, Melee 3, Stealth 3
Stamina 4	Endurance 3, Resistance 2
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 3	Awareness 3
Intelligence 2	Engineering 2, Intrusion 1, Medicine 1, Survival 2
Wits 2	Meditation 1, Rapport 1
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 1	Intimidation 3
Manipulation 2	Subterfuge 2
Charisma 2	Savvy 1

Aptitude: (Telepathy) Empathy 1+
Backgrounds: Cipher 3, Devices (biosuit) 4, Influence 1, Resources 3
Willpower: 7
Psi: 2

Chromatics

Chromatics proved to be dangerous opponents in the few months before the Upeo disappeared. Of course, once the teleporters vanished, Earth was cut off from the aliens. From what humans understand of the Chromatics, their civilization is not highly advanced. However, Chromatics are extremely cunning and vicious.

Chromatics are roughly one-and-a-half meters in height, with smooth, dry skin. Their colorful, mottled hide and their hunched, surprisingly flexible frames give the aliens a vaguely reptilian appearance. Their heads have two sets of eyes, but no other visible sensory organs. One set is used for binocular and the other is for wide-angle vision. Only one pair of eyes may be open at a time. A Chromatic's mouth is a vertical slit set between its arms; all four limbs are long and powerful, ending in three-digit extremities. Its stubby vestigial tail seems to serve no other purpose than to provide counterbalance for the creature's forward-leaning frame.

CHROMATIC TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 3	Might 2
Dexterity 4	Athletics 3, Firearms 2, Martial Arts 2, Stealth 3
Stamina 3	Endurance 3
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 3	Awareness 3
Intelligence 1	Engineering 1, Medicine 1, Survival 3
Wits 4	Meditation 2
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 1	Intimidation 3
Manipulation 1	Command 2, Subterfuge 3
Charisma 2	

Aptitude: (Electrokinesis) Photokinesis 4+
Backgrounds: Mentor 5
Willpower: 6
Psi: 7
Gear: Biogun, carrying harness, some clothing

Governments

Although society generally welcomes the existence of psions, human governments' reactions have ranged from open-armed to quarantine. Virtually all governments, despite their public stance, maintain organizations that monitor psions. Such groups vary in structure, responsibility and influence; details remain up to the Storyteller.

• **Police Officer:** Police may go by many names (from security agent to cop to jackbooted thug), but their primary duty is to defend individuals' rights and to maintain civil order. Not as heavily armed or armored as are military forces, police are local representatives of government authority. Military soldiers may be called in to support police under extreme circumstances.

POLICE OFFICER TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 2	Brawl 2 (or Martial Arts 2)
Dexterity 3	Athletics 1, Drive 2, Firearm 3, Melee 1, Stealth 1
Stamina 2	Resistance 1
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 2	Awareness 2, Investigation 2
Intelligence 2	Bureaucracy 1, Engineering 1, Intrusion 1, Medicine 1
Wits 3	Rapport 1
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 2	Intimidation 2
Manipulation 2	Command 1, Subterfuge 1
Charisma 2	Savvy 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 1+, Influence 1, Resources 2
Willpower: 4
Psi: 1
Gear (normal): Aris Whistler Sonic Pistol, Banji Lightning Taser Baton, Wazukana DX70-L PC, vocoder, reinforced clothing (uniform), armor vest, cuffs, flashlight, ID card
Gear (heavy detail): As above, plus: Voss 63K, Orgotek Spinneret-W, field suit, medkit

Specific equipment models may vary from nation to nation; the examples above are standard Lunar police gear.

• **Military Soldier:** Sometimes referred to as "cops without social skills," soldiers are generally viewed with respect. After psions, they are humanity's protectors against hostile aliens. Still, each nation is concerned primarily with its own defense, and soldiers are often sent against international, not interstellar, threats. More heavily armed and armored than police, the military's prime responsibility is to protect the state.

MILITARY SOLDIER TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 2	Brawl 2 (or Martial Arts 2), Might 1
Dexterity 3	Athletics 2, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Melee 2, Stealth 2
Stamina 3	Endurance 1, Resistance 1
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 3	Awareness 2, Investigation 2
Intelligence 2	Bureaucracy 1, Engineering 2, Intrusion 1, Medicine 1, Survival 1
Wits 2	Rapport 1
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 2	Intimidation 2
Manipulation 2	Command 1, Interrogation 1, Subterfuge 1
Charisma 2	

Backgrounds: Contacts 1+, Influence 1, Resources 2
Willpower: 5
Psi: 1
Gear: L-K Vindicator 11, L-K 9 mm Auto, Steinhardt M1-CC PC, vocoder, field suit, flashlight, binoculars, medkit, fieldkit, ID tags

Specific equipment models may vary from nation to nation; the examples above are standard FSM military gear.

• **Government Agent:** These individuals tend to work on their own or in pairs, and can draw on vast resources when necessary. This ranges from financial support to additional agents to calling in military forces. Government agents include investigators, high-ranking officials, spies and assassins. They may be official representatives or covert personnel, and their agendas are anyone's guess. In short, government agents are not people to be trifled with.

GOVERNMENT AGENT TEMPLATE

Physical Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Strength 2	Brawl 2 (or Martial Arts 2)
Dexterity 3	Athletics 1, Drive 2 (or Pilot 2), Firearms 3, Melee 1, Stealth 2
Stamina 2	Resistance 3
Mental Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Perception 4	Awareness 2, Investigation 2
Intelligence 3	Academics 2, Bureaucracy 3, Engineering 2, Intrusion 2, Linguistics 1, Medicine 1, Science 1
Wits 3	Rapport 2
Social Attributes	**Abilities (typical)**
Appearance 2	Intimidation 2
Manipulation 2	Command 2, Interrogation 2, Subterfuge 2
Charisma 2	Etiquette 1, Savvy 1

Backgrounds: Allies 1+, Cipher 2, Contacts 1+, Influence 2, Resources 3
Willpower: 6
Psi: 1
Gear: L-K Personal Protector, Steinhardt M1-AC 11, reinforced clothing, vocoder, ID card

Government agents can requisition whatever gear they need for a given situation. Equipment models may vary from nation to nation; the examples above are for the FSA's Central Security Agency.

Glossary

Every effort has been made to define the various terms, phrases and slang introduced throughout this book in context. This glossary lists many of those terms again for ease of reference. Specific game terms are already listed in the **Introduction**, on page 156.

afoxé: African/Brazilian-mix music.

anima: A 22nd-century, popular music form that involves "organic" stylings. Similar to a variant of 20th-century, mid-range alternative, mixed with trancey goth. Fans are divided into two groups. One embraces an intuitive reality in which physicality (usually represented by hardtech) is ignored in favor of emotions and spirituality (signified by biotech). The other group worships the death drive and is typically depressed by "terrible existential problems of being trapped in an artificial cyberworld." Developed in the wake of Anima Culture (q.v.), anima music became very popular in Europe and Nippon.

Anima (also "Anima Culture," "Anima Continuum," etc.): Influential "underground" or popular school of cultural criticism that seeks to predict how humanity will adapt to the technological advances of the 22nd century, notably bioware and psi. The term is also used as a descriptor of evolving aspects of culture that are especially "organic" or radically different from the "hard" cultures and political structures that existed before. Generally, "anima" means "decentralized, holographic, recursive, fluid" or "mutable."

Anima Music Society: A pro-Western, pro-psi democratic group in China, predominantly in the north where bang music (q.v.) is popular.

Ant Farm Syndrome: A psychological disorder in which the ego disappears, leaving only the exoskeleton of protocol and duty behind. Caused by severe crowding in heavily artificial environments; endemic to Nippon.

asesino(s) de la moto(s): Portuguese for "motorcycle assassinations."

augies: Biotech augmentation devices, also known as "enhancers" or "boosters."

Aum Soto: A cryptic phrase that closed the "Quarantine Broadcast." No one outside Nippon knows what this means.

bandeirante(s): Portuguese for South American "cowboys."

bang: A 22nd-century, popular music form, similar to rock in its driving rhythms, highly sexualized imagery and electronic modulation. Sounds like a worldbeat mutation of techno with important strains including Muzzein Bang (q.v.), Bengal Bang, Marrakesh Bang, Angkor Bang and Harbin Bang.

bangboy: Fan of bang music. Nongender-specific; used as per "clubkid."

bioapps: Biological appliances; biotechnological devices.

Bumen Jibo Tingjiao: Mandarin for "Office of Semiotics."

Bumen Jingshen Jingcha: Mandarin for "Office of Psionic Security."

burrios clandestinos: Portuguese for "shantytowns."

buzhang: Mandarin for "minister."

buzio(s): Portuguese for "shell(s)."

cafezinhos: South American "little coffees"; very thick and sweetened heavily.

Caipirinha: A South American cocktail.

Candomblé: Proper name of African/Brazilian-mix religion.

canga: Portuguese for a beach-wrap skirt.

capoeira: African/Brazilian-mix dance and martial art.

Carioca(s): Portuguese slang for residents of Rio de Janeiro.

centro(s): Portuguese for "center(s)."

Chitra Bhanu: Originally a Vishnavi messianic term used to refer to the eradicated Bombay-based quantakinetic order. Actually spelled *"Chtra Bhanu"* in Hindi.

CPO: Central processing organism, used in reference to those bioapps that contain biological computers.

cybershinto: Slang term used by foreigners to describe the quasireligious protocols that regulate how the *zaibatsu* interact with their corporate computer avatars. Nihonjin have no name for such relationships.

desechables: Portuguese for "throw away" children; street urchins, poor children.

De Naturis Vibus Mentis: Official Catholic position on the psi phenomenon presented by the current pope, Benedict XVIII. Noteworthy for

pleading for a scientific detachment when dealing with psi. It officially discourages projecting saintly or demonic attributions to psions.

divina: The performer/composer of Muzzein Bang who is responsible for both music and visuals at an event. Equivalents in 20th-century media would be "performance artists" or "mixmasters." The sophistication of Muzzein requires that most divinas be psi-active clairsentients.

dongrenyi: Mandarin for "telepathy."

El Capybara: Portuguese for "the Giant Rat."

elgee (from L.-Gee, or lunar gravity): Lunar natives born to parents who are unable to leave Lunar-gravity regions.

en Brazilia: Portuguese for "Brazil"; Brazilian.

er: Mandarin for "two"; Chinese designation for Alpha Centauri B.

Erthroxylon coca: Proper Latin name for the coca leaf's active agent.

fengming: Mandarin for "phoenix song."

figa: A talisman shaped like a fist with the thumb up between the second and third fingers; a good luck charm in most South American cultures.

fulgee (from full gee, or full gravity): Natives of the Moon born to parents capable of functioning in full Earth gravity.

Han: "Chinese," not generally used by non-Chinese.

Hidden Fortress: An insanely elaborate defense screen designed to keep any Aberrant short of Godzilla out of Japan, and designed to fry those who are stupid enough to try.

holosim: Also just "sim." A virtual-reality environment. Holosims range from basic headset-projection holograms to room-sized holographic environments to advanced playgrounds with multiple holographic projectors, live actors computer-controlled gimbals and adjustable rooms.

honglong: Mandarin for "red dragon."

jibo tingjiao: Mandarin for "empathy."

Jingshen Daxueyuan: Mandarin for "Psi Institute."

Jingshen Jiaobu: Mandarin for "Ministry of Psionic Affairs."

Joe Hologram: An everyday person; the average citizen. While the slang term survives, the computer agent from which it originated has long since fallen into obscurity.

jogo do bicho: Portuguese for "game of the animals"; a gambling lottery.

jogo dos buzios: Portuguese for "game of shells"; future-reading, like tarot.

junta(s): Portuguese for "bully government."

justiça: Portuguese for "justice."

Kazuhito: Nippon's quasidivine, titular leader.

kusanyiko: Swahili for "assembly."

LAO: Lunar (or Low-gravity) Aggravated Osteoporosis; a syndrome that consists of weakened musculature and thin, brittle bones. The human body isn't designed to function with such weakened structural integrity, and humans with LAO can break their own bones by walking. Both genders have radically shortened life spans and a low quality of life as their internal organs compress and their bones collapse. Post-menopausal women are generally affected more severely than are men.

latent: A person with the potential to manifest psionic powers.

lei: Portuguese for "law."

Ligua Zhixun: Advice from the Widow/*Madame Bue's Little Book.*

los magico(s): Portuguese for "the magician(s)."

lulong: Mandarin for "green dragon."

macrotech: Large, obvious devices, mostly non- or minimally invasive to the user's body.

madonna: The latest fashion movement.

mafaa: Swahili for "utility."

Mao Restoration: A dangerous, underground political alliance between Chinese tongs and Russian extremists.

Mashriqi: ISRA's collective leadership. Singular "Mashriq." From the Arabic term for a Ba'hai temple. Symbol is a nine-sided figure like one of Gurdjieff's enneads.

matrix: The cells used to produce bioware.

matrix computers: The computers that interface psionically with technicians to produce bioware; they also record templates for bioware.

mestizo: Portuguese reference to a half-Native American, half-foreign person.

microtech: Tiny, biological nanotechnology that is mostly invasive to the user's body.

Mineiro(s): Portuguese slang for residents of Minas Gerais.

moja: Swahili for "one."

mujukuu: Swahili for "grandchild."

Muzzein Bang: A strain of the bang music entertainment genre, marked by heavy incorporation of clairsentient imagery and propaganda; the unofficial theme music of 22nd-century Ba'hai. Also called "Vision Bang" for its reliance on symbolic simulation of clairsentient states and "holographic awareness."

mwalimu: Swahili for "teacher" (an honorific).

neutral: A human lacking psionic potential. Also called a neut, normal, norm, blank or empty.

Nihonjin: "Japanese." Used as both a cultural and ethnic adjective.

Nordisto(s): Portuguese slang for residents of the northern areas.

Nova Fôrça de Nacionales: The New National Force.

olaminium: The ultradense element 114, named for the head of the research project on *Mafaa-3*, Dr. E.J. Olamina; stable, non-radioactive, used mostly for military applications at this point.

Orbital China: The community of Chinese living and working in space. Treated like "Overseas China" was in the 20th century.

orgone: Alex Cassel's term for the psionic energy particular to electrokinetic manipulations. The Prexy claims orgone permeates all living things and carries the erotic drives. EKs often draw parallels between this hypothetical fluid and electric current.

Orgosoft Farms: Orgotek bioware plantations.

Orgulho de Céu: Portuguese for "Pride of the Sky."

Pai/Mae de Santo: Portuguese for "Father/Mother of the Saints."

paredão necessário: Portuguese for "necessary wall."

Paulista(s): Portuguese slang for residents of Sào Paulo.

Permanent Refugee Zones: Regions of the Earth's surface that are so badly damaged that they will remain uninhabitable for decades to come. Includes France, the Zuider Zee, Berlin, Saudi Arabia, Northern Ireland, and many others.

plasmal matrix: Cells of single-celled eukaryotic origin, predistinguishing between flora and fauna.

preserva: Portuguese for "(to) preserve."

preservação(s): Portuguese for "preservation(s)."

Psi Nippon: The Nihonjin youth culture that embraces biotech-

nology, psions and anima culture. Most live either outside Nippon or wish they could. They're considered delinquents by proper Nihonjin society, but not yet a threat to Nippon's cultural stability.

psion: A human with active psionic powers. Also called "Gifted."

psyq: Derogatory term for a psion.

qigong: Mandarin for "acupuncture."

Qin: The Mandarin character for "elegant" or "pleasingly artificial." Also a Cantonese term for the "painted" class of Chinese opera characters.

Qinri: Mandarin for "sun of the Qin."

Qinshui: Mandarin for "ocean of the Qin"; designation for the Qin homeworld.

Quarantine, the: Japan's "Closed-Door Policy," 2047-2103.

rockwell: To analyze fashion and judge it fabulous (or atrocious).

santo(s): Portuguese for "saint(s)."

scan that spectra: Miners' jargon that's comparable to "check that out!"

shekh: From the Hindi *"shekhinah."* The indwelling presence of God; "fun" in bangspeak. The quality that makes something good.

Society of Jesus: A Jesuit organization. Telepath Proxy Rebecca Bue was reportedly schooled by the society years ago.

symcause: Slang term; abbreviation for "symptom + cause" or "symbiotic cause." It means by-product, holographic result or synchronistic effect.

taint: Term given to the effect of Aberrant mutation on individuals and environments.

Tekne Group: The hardtech and cyberkinetic research arm of Orgotek.

Temple Judaism: A modification of modern Jewish doctrine that harkens back to more traditional views; the result when an expansionist Israel doesn't have to share Jerusalem any longer.

tepuis: Portuguese for "flat-topped mountain steppes" (singular and plural).

tereiro: Candomblé house of worship.

terra de naturale: Portuguese for "land of nature."

terraforming: Manipulating a planetary environment artificially to make it more like Earth.

Tesser: The bio-organic computer that performs calculations for the new jump ships.

Total Allergy Syndrome: A psychogenetic disorder with which the sufferer becomes oversensitive to such a degree that contact with just about anything can be deadly. Sufferers live in plastic-bubble environments.

uitlander(s): Swahili for "foreigner(s)."

Umbandist Heresy: The Orthodox Catholic term for Umbanda.

Upeo wa Macho: Swahili for "the horizon."

Vatican Reforms (2084): The conciliatory bull that updated the Vatican to the 21st century. An impressive document (its main flaw is that it came as late as it did), the bull outlines such things as allowing women to join the priesthood, and instructing the clergy to take a more active role in charity work.

vidmusic: sight/sound recordings.

wakina sisi: Portuguese for "people like us."

WEI: The public relations/administrative arm of Orgotek.

yeh: Used globally as an adjective as well as an expression of agreement. Means "cool," "it's good," and "know what I mean?"

yi: Mandarin for "one"; Chinese designation for Alpha Centauri A.

Young Marxians: Idealistic young neo-Marxist types who stage demonstrations in Chinese universities.

zaibatsu: Nihonjin for "corporation." Rigid semihereditary organizations that rule Nippon in the absence of a civil government.

zhan: Mandarin for "station" (to stand).

zikkir: An ISRA mnemonic trigger; derived from Arabic sufi terminology.

Geographic Glossary

The regions listed below are places that have changed dramatically since or weren't settled in the 20th century. Maps provided in this book indicate the specific geographical locations of these places.

Bharati Commonwealth: "India." The official name of the Indian bloc, but it's rarely used by foreigners; "India" is still preferred. Includes present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Belt, the: Spacers' slang for the Asteroid Belt.

Caucastan: Fierce little country sandwiched between Russia and the Turks. Originally known as Georgia or Armenia.

Djakarta: "Jakarta." The most important of the Indonesi city-states; a sort-of "happy man's Tokyo"; the "Computer Crossroads of the World." These cities are so rich that they've actually bridged the gap between Djava and some outlying islands in order to expand their real estate.

Funan: "Vietnam." A completely decentralized Anima Zone with no capital city. The name is homage to the ancient mercantile culture of the region, which is similar to that of the Phoenicians.

Honshu: The largest of Nippon's Home Islands. Completely paved.

Indonesi: "Indonesia." Includes the old "Malaysia." The center of New Islam. Ba'hai and computers predominate.

IPETA: "Island Peoples' Economic Treaties Alliance." A loose economic bloc dominated by Nippon, including the Indonesian city-states and the various Polynesian groups. Singapore is a member in name only, as it relies more on China and Brazil.

Israel-Judah: Messianic nation comprising the present-day states of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Sinai peninsula, and parts of Syria. "The Promised Land."

Kampuchea: "Cambodia." The multimedia art capital of Asia. Fab anima scene.

Khantze Lu Ge: "Castle in the Air"; Alpha Centauri Colony (the Chinese refer to it as Kongzhong Lou Ge).

Kuala Lumpur: The last vestige of "Malaysia." Supports terrorists all over the continent in hopes of restoring the "sanity" of the 20th century; ally of the FSA.

Malaya-Indonesi Islands: "Indonesia." The new name reflects a wave of ethnic solidarity; the Malaysians are really just another Indonesian subculture, speaking the same language.

Mianmar: "Burma." A deliberately sleepy and anachronistic place full of people who just want to be left alone. They tend to agree with China on political issues to assert how different they are from India.

Moskva: "Moscow."
Netherlands: Little more than a collection of tiny islands ravaged in the Aberrant War.
Nippon: "Japan." Includes the "Kuril" (Chishima) Islands.
Oman: A rich and decadent place of gambling and glamor; the new Riviera. The "depraved sultan" splinter of the Islamic world.
Outer Manchuria: "Kamchatka." Territories shared with Russia after the Collapse in a perpetual lease/resource-sharing arrangement. Chinese are encouraged to emigrate there in order to secure a permanent hold on the territory.
Persia: "Iran." A deeply introspective, even mournful country where post-Old Jerusalem Islam has evolved into something approaching medieval Catholicism.
Pyongyang: The "Inner Capital" of reunited Korea.
Rock, the: Earth; orbital-station slang.
Russian Federation: Includes Belorussia and Ukrainia; does not include Kazakhstan or any of Soviet Central Asia southward.
Taiwan: The glorious 23rd province of united China.
Tibet: This nation is much more firmly Chinese than it was in previous centuries, although there were "problems" with the choice of the current Dalai Lama.
Tours: Site of the *Esperanza*-France Memorial.
Turkic Federation: The loose union of Turkey and the various ex-Soviet Central Asian republics as far east as the Chinese border (separated from Turkey proper by the Caspian Sea). The secularist splinter of Islam, populated by rational-talking sufi; a trusty supporter of ISRA. Home to some of the sanest people on Earth in the 22nd century.
Ulanbator: Capital of the former Mongolia, now the main staging area for Chinese heavy industry and military orbital activities; a major power involved with the Co-Development Zone. A beautiful city in 2120; arguably one of the greatest examples of 22nd-century architecture.
Wanjing: "City of Endurance"; designation for the Chinese colony on Mars.
Xigaze: Tibetan administrative center with a small orbital launch port, used primarily for research and some tourism.
Xinjiang: A desert and westernmost province of contemporary China, inhabited primarily by the mean-spirited Turkic descendants of Tamerlane.
Yunnan: A backwater province in southwestern China; home to many ethnic minorities. The region was damaged severely by a supposedly malfunctioning fusion dome.
Yutu Yinchan: "The Rabbit in the Moon"; Chinese section of Olympus.
Zhongguo: Mandarin term for "China." The English "China" and "Chinese" are generally used in text because "Zhong Guo" isn't nearly as familiar to Western audiences as is "Nippon," for example. Includes Taiwain, Korea and Mongolia on maps, as well as some indication of shared control over the southeastern region of Siberia.
Zizhiqu: Mandarin term for China's Autonomous Region.
Zurich-Geneva: The voice of Switzerland (and often the rest of the fragmented European Commonwealth).

Suggested Source Materials

Every series has its own feel, but the following are some books and films that can serve as useful reference for any **Æon** game. Since players and Storyteller work together to create the game's look and feel, no one should hesitate to suggest ways to make the series more enjoyable for everyone.

Recommended Reading

While **Æon** itself strives for a fast-paced, science-fiction-adventure mood, the books listed below range from strict cyberpunk to science-fantasy psionics. This small sampling of reading material can provide you with many launching points for a character or a series.

Bear, Greg — *Queen of Angels*, *Slant*. Good descriptions of arcologies and biotechnology. Additionally, his computer characters make a good reference for **Æon** computer agents.

Brin, David — *Sundiver*, *The Uplift War*. Provides intriguing and entertaining characterizations of human and alien interaction.

Dick, Philip K. — *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* This book gives a good feel for a ravaged North America (as does *Blade Runner*, the film that's based on the novel).

Effinger, George Alec — *When Gravity Fails*, *A Fire in the Sun*, *The Exile Kiss*. Aside from the brain-modification gear in Effinger's series (which itself isn't inconceivable in **Æon**), these three books are almost a perfect match for the setting.

Egan, Greg — *Distress*, *Permutation City*, *Quarantine*. His books provide some great background on the look and attitudes of a future Australia. *Distress* is most suitable for its African characters, settings and technology.

Foster, Alan Dean — *Nor Crystal Tears*. A good first-contact book that creates a feeling of strange "otherness" about aliens.

Gibson, William — *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, *Virtual Light*, *Idoru*. Excellent for its scheming corporations and gritty characters. His cyberspace differs from the OpNet, but has some crossover.

Hamilton, Peter — *Mindstar Rising*. This thriller with a psionic investigator/assassin lead offers cool ideas for psi stunts. The flooded Britain setting has possibilities for European stories, as well.

May, Julian — *Jack the Bodiless*, *Diamond Mask*, *Magnificat*. The Galactic Milieu series has some interesting stuff on how humans interact with those who possess psi powers.

McHugh, Maureen — *China Mountain Zhang*, *Half the Day is Night*. The former is an absolutely fantastic look at a future with China in charge; many of the concepts translate very well into **Æon**. The latter doesn't convert as easily, but features a world where Brazil and Africa are leaders.

Resnick, Mike — *Second Contact*, various "Kirinyaga" stories. The former is a good blueprint for what to do when a first meeting between two species goes horribly wrong. His cycle of "Kirinyaga" stories is great for a future Africa (though different from **Æon**'s) that mixes tribal culture with high-tech society.

Robinson, Kim Stanley — *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, *Blue Mars*. Required reading for someone running a Mars series. Robinson excels at making Mars vivid and real.

Stephenson, Neal — *Snow Crash*, *The Diamond Age*. While Stephenson's nanotech is decades ahead of **Æon** technology, his humor and characters mesh well.

Vinge, Joan D. — *Psion*, *Catspaw*. Vinge's psions aren't the same as those in **Æon**, but they provide good inspiration for how psi powers work. Plus, they create a great feeling for a tech world filled with aliens, technology and hard-core political realities.

Recommended Films

Movies are great for establishing a setting's visual tone. A picture is worth a thousand words.

2001: A Space Odyssey. One of the most realistic SF films in terms of technology, ***2001*** conveys the wonders of space and of human potential.

Alien, Aliens. The first conveys perfectly the horrific menace that aliens (or Aberrants, for our purposes) convey. The latter movie, with a few adjustments, could be about a Legionnaire team in action. The realism of both movies, from characters to dialogue to technology, is particularly impressive.

Blade Runner. Mentioned with the books, this movie is a perfect example of **Æon**'s Western society in the 22nd century.

Event Horizon. Visually stunning and the science is decent, even if the story is heavy-handed.

Johnny Mnemonic. Okay, the movie's plot doesn't do justice to Gibson's story, but it does convey a sense of cross-cultural interaction.

Outland. Dated, sure, but it establishes a strong sense of isolation on the fringes of settled space.

The Road Warrior, ***Mad Max***. Very good examples of a Crash society. Some Outback regions still face this kind of lawlessness and desolation.

Star Wars, ***The Empire Strikes Back***, ***Return of the Jedi***. Although a science-fantasy space opera, the Star Wars trilogy encompasses the idea of epic conflict with a very personal focus.

Strange Days. The setting isn't as advanced as **Æon**'s, but this movie shows the seedy side of society and individuals, and has some great tech.

Until the End of the World: A low-key depiction of what the world of the 22nd century could be like (just pretend that Europe isn't intact). Perhaps one of the best film examples of computer agents in use.

Recommended Anime

Æon has some ties to Japanese animation, and you can find a lot of great story hooks and visual references in anime.

Akira. A great story about a dystopic future, with tech quite in keeping with **Æon**'s mood. Plus, first-hand display of Aberrant powers.

Aria. Space travel, neat-looking weapons and armor, and the main enemy is an Aberrant!

Ghost in the Shell. The weaponry in this is killer, and the cityscape could be extrapolated to almost any **Æon** arcology.

Macross RDF, ***Macross Zentradi***. The former is good for looking at various types of hardtech. The latter gives a nice feel for biotech.

Zeta Gundam. Fun, and with all sorts of great spaceship, orbital-station and vehicle references.

NAME:
SERIES:

ORIGIN:
NATURE:

APTITUDE:
ALLEGIANCE:

ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

PHYSICAL

STRENGTH ●○○○○

Brawl ○○○○○ ☐
Might ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

DEXTERITY ●○○○○

Athletics ○○○○○ ☐
Drive ○○○○○ ☐
Firearms ○○○○○ ☐
Legerdemain ○○○○○ ☐
Martial Arts ○○○○○ ☐
Melee ○○○○○ ☐
Pilot ○○○○○ ☐
Stealth ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

STAMINA ●○○○○

Endurance ○○○○○ ☐
Resistance ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

MENTAL

PERCEPTION ●○○○○

Awareness ○○○○○ ☐
Investigation ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

INTELLIGENCE ●○○○○

Academics ○○○○○ ☐
Bureaucracy ○○○○○ ☐
Engineering ○○○○○ ☐
Intrusion ○○○○○ ☐
Linguistics ○○○○○ ☐
Medicine ○○○○○ ☐
Science ○○○○○ ☐
Survival ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

WITS ●○○○○

Arts ○○○○○ ☐
Meditation ○○○○○ ☐
Rapport ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

SOCIAL

APPEARANCE ●○○○○

Intimidation ○○○○○ ☐
Style ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

MANIPULATION ●○○○○

Command ○○○○○ ☐
Interrogation ○○○○○ ☐
Subterfuge ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

CHARISMA ●○○○○

Etiquette ○○○○○ ☐
Perform ○○○○○ ☐
Savvy ○○○○○ ☐
○○○○○ ☐

HEALTH

Bruised	-0	☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Maimed	-3	☐
Crippled	-4	☐
Incapacitated		☐
Dead		☐

COMBAT

ATTACK	ACC	DMG	ROF	FT
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐

ARMOR	RTG B	RTG L	BULK	FT
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐

EXPERIENCE

INITIATIVE

MOVEMENT
WALK RUN SPRINT

PLAYER:

ADVANTAGES

WILLPOWER

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

PSI

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
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APTITUDE

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Dedication

To **Ray Bradbury**, for making the fantastic approachable and the mundane wondrous.
To **George Lucas**, for giving us new legends to believe in. Utinni!

CREDITS

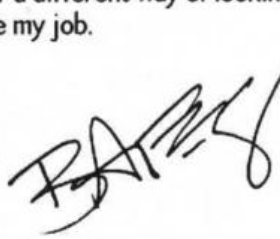
AFTERWORD

So, this is it.

This is **Æon**. Even after months of late nights, heated design meetings and sweeping revisions, I still get a charge out of rifling through the pages. After all this time, my vision, and that of a collection of supremely talented individuals, is now a reality. It's one helluva bash we've put together here. Take a look at the credits; each one of those people helped shape **Æon**. There wouldn't even be a party if it weren't for all those folks — I'm really just a glorified chaperone.

There's a lot I could say about my experiences on this project and about the setting, but I think **Æon** speaks for itself. There's plenty of entertainment and adventure in this book. But, underneath that — indeed, resonating throughout **Æon** — are concepts that, if you're not careful, will make you think. Not just about the setting, but about yourself and the world around you. That's what good SF has always done, and that's what **Æon** does.

I hope you enjoyed the book, whether you flipped through it in preparation for making your own psion character, or whether you read it as solid SF entertainment. Even if just one little thing in this hefty tome sparks your imagination, makes you think about new possibilities or a different way of looking at the world, then I've done my job.



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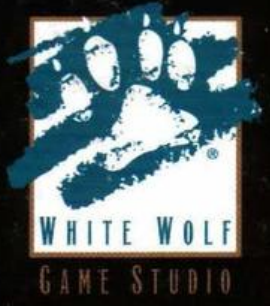
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